



Conference Report: Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development

4-5 April 2018 - Wageningen, the Netherlands

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WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

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This report presents the key highlights and contributions from the conference 'Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development'. This conference was held on 4-5 April 2018 in Wageningen, the Netherlands and was the eleventh annual 'M&E on the Cutting Edge' conference. This event was organised by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI). This conference aimed to seek clarity in the role that communication can play in generating and using evidence for sustainable development.

Keywords: conference, evaluation, monitoring, communication, evidence, sustainable development

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Preface

This report summarises the outline and outputs of the conference 'Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development', which took place on April 4-5, 2018, the Netherlands.

This conference is part of the annual WCDI series 'M&E on the Cutting Edge'. These annual events are organised by the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, in collaboration with partners, this year Oxfam. So far, the following events have been organised:

- **2018 'Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development'**, with Prof. Dr. Noelle Aarts and Dr. Irene de Goede; Wageningen, 4-5 April 2018
<https://tinyurl.com/ycy3gofx>
- **2017 'Measuring what matters in a 'post-truth' society'**, with Wendy Asbeek Brusse, Claire Hutchings and Robert Dijksterhuis; Wageningen, 6 April 2017
<http://tinyurl.com/zd7esy6>
- **2016 'Partnering for Success: How M&E can Strengthen Partnerships for Sustainable Development'**, with Bruce Byiers and Ros Tennyson; Wageningen, 17-18 March 2016
<http://tinyurl.com/pr88j6c>
- **2015 'M&E for Responsible Innovation'**, with Prof. Dr. Phil Macnaghten and Dr. Irene Guijt; Wageningen, 19-20 March 2015
<http://tinyurl.com/o3oucuz>
- **2014 'Improving the use of monitoring and evaluation processes and findings'**, with Marlène Läubli Loud; Ismael Akhalwaya & Carlo Bakker; Wageningen, 20-21 March 2014
<http://tinyurl.com/pxhvwfs>
- **2013 'Impact evaluation: taking stock and moving ahead'**, with Dr. Elliot Stern and Dr. Irene Guijt; Wageningen, 25-26 March 2013
<https://tinyurl.com/jps9wce>
- **2012 'Expert seminar on Developmental Evaluation' and 'Global hot issues on the M&E agenda'**, with Dr Michael Quinn Patton; Wageningen, 22-23 March 2012
<http://tinyurl.com/nbw29ub>
- **2011 'Realist Evaluation'**, with Dr. Gill Westhorp; Wageningen, 22-23 March 2011
<http://tinyurl.com/mhw89ka>
- **2010 'Evaluation Revisited. Improving the Quality of Evaluative Practice by Embracing Complexity'**, Utrecht, 20-21 May 2010
<http://evaluationrevisited.wordpress.com/>
- **2009 'Social Return On Investment'**, Wageningen, March 2009
- **2009 'Innovation dialogue - Being strategic in the face of complexity'**, Wageningen, 31 November and 1 December 2009
<http://tinyurl.com/nfxzdpq>
- **Other innovation dialogues on complexity:**
<http://portals.wi.wur.nl/navigatingcomplexity/>

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- **Keynote speakers:** prof. dr. Noelle Aarts (Radboud University) and dr. Irene de Goede (Oxfam);
- **Conference contributions** (parallel sessions, in order of appearance in the programme): Mirjam Schaap and Heidi van Groningen (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands), Tessa Steenbergen (tessasteenbergen.nl, the Netherlands); Acacia Nikoi, PhD and Richard Bamattre (University of Minnesota, United States of America), Laura Wangsness Willemsen, PhD (Concordia University, United States of America); Karen Biesbrouck and Sanne Djojosoeparto (Oxfam Novib, the Netherlands); Anteneh Mekuria Tesfaye (Sesame Business Network, Ethiopia); Roger Reuver (RCO Design, the Netherlands), Joost Guijt (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands); Riti Hermán Mostert (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands); Julien Colomer (IUCN, Switzerland); Jorge Chavez-Tafur, PhD and Krishan Bheenick (CTA, the Netherlands), Marga Janse (The Majas ConneXion, the Netherlands); Caroline Desalos (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands), Just Dengerink (Wageningen Economic Research, the Netherlands), Saskia van Veen, PhD (Oxfam Novib, the Netherlands); Myriam Van Parijs (Enabel, Belgium); Christopher J. Stanfill, PhD (Pencils of Promise, United States of America); Mike Zuijderduijn and Irma Alpenidze (MDF Training & Consultancy, the Netherlands); Hanneke Post and Masja Helmer (Both ENDS, the Netherlands); Fédes van Rijn and Just Dengerink (Wageningen Economic Research, the Netherlands), Martijn Ramaekers (PUM Netherlands Senior Experts, the Netherlands), Liesbeth Hofs (RVO – CBI, the Netherlands); Martin Klein (Changeroo, the Netherlands and Caroline Desalos (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands).
- **Conference facilitators:** Jan Brouwers and Riti Hermán Mostert (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands).
- **Conference reporters:** Charlotte Neher, Ines Humaira, Marieke Rotman and Marion Cuisin (Wageningen University), Felix Krussmann (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation).
- **Conference organisers:** Cecile Kusters (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation; conference coordinator) in collaboration with Irene Guijt (Oxfam UK), Hermine ten Hove, Jan Brouwers and Riti Hermán Mostert (all Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, the Netherlands).

Furthermore, we would like to thank Jack van der Vorst for his introduction and input; Tessa Steenbergen for the video production that brought the energy of the conference to those who could not attend; Percy Cilia Jr. for the photographs; and Lotte van den Berg, Laurens van Bodegom, Robbert Noteboom, Ton Hoogveldt and Elisabeth Hopperus Buma for essential support.

Finally, we thank the conference participants who contributed to lively presentations and discussions.

We hope that this conference report and related conference products¹ will further stimulate our thinking around communicating evidence for sustainable development.

Wageningen, the Netherlands

July 2018

The conference organisers

¹ Conference products include presentations, videos, photos, background information, and a conference report. These can all be downloaded from <http://www.managingforimpact.org/conference-products>

List of abbreviations and acronyms

BENEFIT	Bilateral Ethiopian-Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade Partnership
CASCADE	Capacity building for Scaling up of evidence-based best Practices in agricultural production
CBI	Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTA	Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ENTAG	Ethiopian-Netherlands Trade Facility for Agribusiness (ENTAG)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IAB	Inclusive Agribusiness
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
ISSD	Integrated Seed Sector Development
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LES	Learn, Earn, and Save
LPEF	Laws on Protection and Empowerment of Farmers
LPEFAS	Laws on Protection and Empowerment of Fisherfolk and Salt Farmers
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PoP	Pencils of Promise
PRIME	Pioneering Real-time Impact Monitoring and Evaluation
PSD	Private Sector Development
R2F	Right to Food
RVO	Dutch Enterprise Agency
SBN	Sesame Business Network
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WCDI	Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research
WEcR	Wageningen Economic Research
WUR	Wageningen University & Research

Summary

This report presents the highlights and contributions from the conference 'Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development'. This conference was held on 4-5 April 2018 in Wageningen, the Netherlands and was the eleventh annual 'M&E on the Cutting Edge' conference, organised by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI). The conference aimed to seek clarity in the role that communication can play in generating and using evidence for sustainable development. We looked at the meaning of the word "evidence", at the challenges and opportunities in the generation and use of evidence to influence sustainable development, and the role that communication can play in transformational change processes in general and in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development specifically. Key insights were drawn from the two keynotes, fifteen workshops and the results of the concluding session.

A keynote speech by prof. Noelle Aarts (Radboud University) was centred around the statement that 'facts are facts, and perceptions are reality'. Perception is what determines our view of the world. And perception is selective. We cannot take in all the information that surrounds us, so we strategically choose based on what fits into our existing cognitive frames, which we construct in groups of likeminded people. To challenge our frames and to understand other groups, to bridge and not only to bond, dialogue is needed, for which guidelines were provided. In the second keynote, by dr. Irene de Goede (Oxfam), issues raised and lessons learnt at Oxfam's recent 'Evidence for Influencing' conference were shared. Some conditions that need to be in place for effective communication of evidence were identified: "[Evidence] needs to be credible, well-timed, carefully framed and communicated, propositional (solution-oriented) and supported by other strategies".

To use evidence effectively, we need to understand that evidence is not taken at face value: it is contested. It also does not speak for itself: it needs to be part of a convincing narrative. To determine what evidence is needed, it is important to engage people in a process of learning and include multiple perspectives. Dialogue between those who plan, those who research/evaluate and those who communicate is necessary to ensure effective, interdisciplinary generation and use of evidence. Mixed methods can be useful to generating powerful stories, mixing numbers and qualitative evidence. Shared learning and sense-making help to go from evidence to decision-making. And early integration of communication in M&E/research processes can lead to improved uptake or use of evidence. We conclude that a focus on communication in M&E/research processes is crucial and that there are plenty of opportunities to integrate communication in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development.

1 About the conference and the report

1.1 Why the conference

"The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations". (Source: UNDP, downloaded June 2018).

In order to address the complex challenges we have at hand, and work towards the SDGs, we need evidence to inform our strategic and operational decision-making. Communication is crucial in this process, not only to present evidence, but to generate it as well. It is the red thread in the way we plan, manage, implement, and monitor and evaluate our efforts, as indicated in the 'Managing for Sustainable Development Impact' framework. This is an adaptive management approach that integrates planning, monitoring and evaluation, by engaging people in learning-oriented processes, adapting to changes in the context, and having the necessary capacities and conditions in place. Effective communication is a key condition for impact.

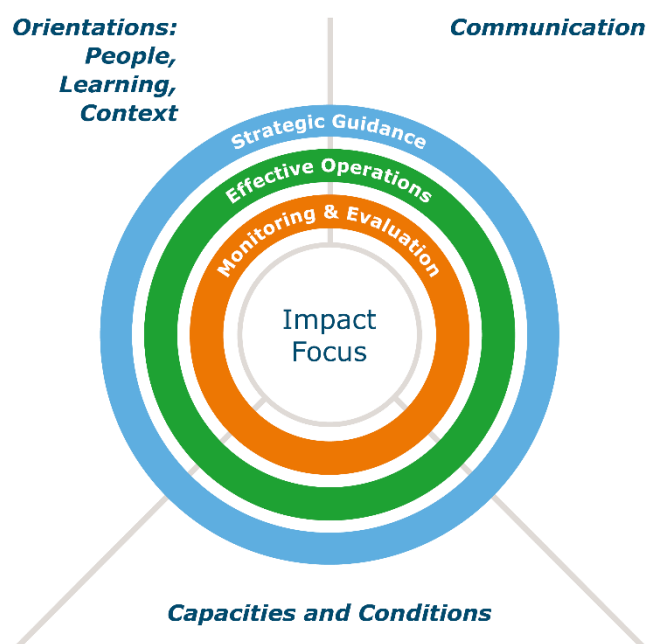


Figure 1 *Managing for Sustainable Development Impact Framework*².

² Kusters, C.S.L. and Batjes, K. with Wigboldus, S., Brouwers, J. and Baguma, S.D. (2017) *Managing for Sustainable Development Impact: An Integrated Approach to Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation*, Wageningen: Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3362/978178044980>

So how do we communicate effectively? One of the first models to explain communication is Shannon and Weaver's linear model of communication³: communication occurs by the channelling of a message from person A to person B. While this seems simple enough in theory, we know communicating facts often does not happen like this in complex reality. This was highlighted in 2016, when Oxford Dictionaries named the word "post-truth" as international word of the year⁴. Post-truth is defined as "Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Clearly, there are other factors at play in communicating evidence.

This conference aimed to seek clarity in the role that communication can play in generating and using evidence for sustainable development. How can evidence generated by research, monitoring and evaluation, dialogue, et cetera be better used to influence decision making and transformational change? What are other factors at play when influencing transformational change processes and how can we deal with this? What role can communication play in all of these processes? And what does this mean for you as a development professional?

In order to answer these questions, we looked at the meaning of the word "evidence", at the challenges and opportunities in the generation and use of evidence to influence sustainable development, and the role that communication can play in transformational change processes in general and in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development specifically.

1.2 About the programme and the report

The conference was created through rich and diverse sessions offered to the 115 participants from all over the world (Appendix 1). Cecile Kusters, the conference coordinator from Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI), and Jack van der Vorst, general director of the Social Sciences Group of Wageningen University & Research (WUR), opened the conference. Jack discussed the role of WUR in relation to communication to support the generation and use of evidence for creating impact. WUR is concerned with aligning research with impact in practice, with special regard to the SDGs. Creating impact is not just about evidence and technology, but also about stakeholder involvement and acceptance. An example is the case of cultured meat. Different stakeholders may hold different perspectives at such developments, and a multi-disciplinary approach and (intercultural) communication are crucial in working with these perspectives. Knowledge institutes such as Wageningen University have a specific role to play as they produce specific and scientific knowledge. It was acknowledged by Jack that there is a gap between the perception and experience of citizens and the perception and ideas of scientists. These ideas of stakeholders are not mutually exclusive and interacting through dialogue with civil society stakeholders could be beneficial to society at large.

The first keynote speech by prof. dr. Noelle Aarts (Radboud University) was centred around the statement that 'facts are facts, and perceptions are reality'. In the second keynote, dr. Irene de Goede (Oxfam Novib) shared lessons from their recently held 'Evidence for Influencing' conference. Both keynotes provided insights to address the core conference questions:

1. What do we understand by 'evidence'?
2. What are challenges and opportunities in the generation and use of evidence to influence sustainable development?
3. What role can communication play in transformational change processes in general and in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development specifically?

Subsequent (parallel) sessions provided space for presenters and participants to learn from and discuss various cases (15) from around the world. All these contributions were asked to also address the conference questions in their presentations and discussions. The conference concluded with a plenary interactive session to synthesise key insights.

³ In the 'Managing for Sustainable Development Impact' guide: Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). The mathematical theory of communication. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press;

⁴ Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is... (2016, November 16). Retrieved June 27, 2018, from <https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/press/news/2016/11/15/WOTY-16>

The structure of this report follows the conference programme. Brief introductions are provided for each of the contributions. At the end of every contribution, a link to the presentation is given. More detailed information on each topic, including background papers, presentations, videos and photos, can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/ycy3gofx>.

2 Keynote speeches

2.1 Facts Are Facts, Perceptions Are Reality

Prof. Dr. Noelle Aarts

Professor of Socio-ecological Interactions, Radboud University Faculty of Sciences, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.



"Framing: to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communication" (Entman, 1993)"

The first keynote speaker, Noelle Aarts, was named "The most inspiring communication Prof in the Netherlands" (2016 & 2017). She kicked off the conference by indicating that communicating evidence for sustainable development is an enormous challenge. Sustainable development is complex and a contested issue, a wicked problem: difficult to solve, and where many people from different backgrounds are involved. This needs dialogue. But how can we understand conversations? Noelle

explained that there are three patterns in communication: selective perception and framing; valuing knowledge; and dealing with emotions.

Selective Perception and Framing

We make stories to understand the world. These stories consist of a selection of the things we see and hear. We call this framing. We select, meaning that framing is not random but always strategic. This has to do with our experiences, desires, expectations. How we frame things, issues, phenomena depends on our culture. A dog in the Netherlands is framed as beloved company and considered to be 'part of the family', whilst in some parts of Asia dogs are eaten. We do not have our frames just as an individual, we construct them socially, while connecting with like-minded people.

There are two ways of connecting: through bonding and bridging (from 'Bowling alone', by Robert Putnam). *Bonding* is connecting with like-minded people, and this does not need encouragement. *Bridging* is with people who think differently, and where we need more efforts to connect.

Bonding and bridging:
"we mostly take decisions that our peers would also take... We construct our frames, our evidence in groups... **To stay critical** we need to listen to people that think differently"

We think our decisions are our own, rational and well thought-through. However, in reality, we take decisions that people in our community would take as well, as described in the book of Christakis and Fowler, titled 'Connected, The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives'⁵. Because we construct our frames in groups, the interpretation of facts is not so much contested. Philosopher David Hume said 'The truth springs from arguments with friends'. We should realize that our frames, which we take for granted, and that we may call 'facts', can be differently perceived by others. So when we meet different people we should very well listen to them. Otto Scharmer (2011) described 4 types of listening:

- Downloading: listening and selecting or confirming what we already know. Nice conversation but not very innovative. 80% of our listening is downloading.
- Object focused listening: listening to something new, being curious.
- Empathic listening: listening and postponing your own judgement and interpretation, really being open to the other.
- Generative listening: going with the flow and learning something new, where dialogue really can take place.

⁵ Connected. The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives. Nicholas Christakis and James H. Fowler

Valuing knowledge

We bring knowledge and facts into all conversations, to get people on our side. Instead of being curious about their perspective, we try to convince them to believe in our perspective. But what happens if we use evidence in our conversations? Noelle showed a video of an example where knowledge, facts and emotions clash. When talking about knowledge in communication, we should also take emotions into account. Emotions show a lot of facts. And there are no facts that we can understand without any emotions.

"When we talk about knowledge in communication, we should also take emotions into account"

Dealing with emotions

We often think that emotions are irrational, a sign of weakness, and that we can exclude them from the facts. As a result, a lot of our conversations are quite violent, because other people feel insulted, blamed. In conversations, often the content goes to the background and it is all about identity. So we should listen to each other, with attention and respect, ask questions rather than trying to convince the other with our own perspective. It is also useful to recognize that there are different truths, and ask the other persons to explain their perspective. The third guideline is to make underlying norms, assumptions and fears explicit, since they play an important role in the course of the conversation. Furthermore, take emotions seriously, since they show what people really find important, and explore them. Finally, be aware of identities and relational dynamics in the conversations. Applying these guidelines can help to improve the conversations and addressing complex problems.

Guidelines for dialogue:

- Listen with attention and respect
- Recognize different truths
- Make underlying norms, assumptions, fears explicit
- Take emotions seriously
- Be aware of identity and relational dynamics

Get in touch: Email: noelle.aarts@ru.nl | Twitter: [@noelleaarts](https://twitter.com/noelleaarts) | Website: www.ru.nl/english/people/aarts-m | Slides and video: tinyurl.com/yaa6dran

2.2 Evidence for Influencing

Dr. Irene de Goede

Global Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Advisor at Oxfam Novib (the Netherlands)

"Influencing: Systematic efforts to change power relations; attitudes and beliefs; the formulation and implementation of official policies, laws/regulations, budgets; and company policies and practices, in ways that promote more just and sustainable societies without poverty"

Irene de Goede was the second keynote speaker at the conference, and she focused on the lessons learned from Oxfam's recent 'Evidence for Influencing Conference'. She opened by describing how a strong evidence base and robust research is crucial for Oxfam's influencing work. Monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches are needed to inform high quality programmes, organisational strategies and campaigns to maximise Oxfam's impact. To shift the terms of the global debate, Oxfam needs to have good information, and experts who have authority and credibility. Irene indicated that research exists as a mist throughout the organisation and is important for different functions, like campaigning, communication and policy advice. The "Evidence for Influencing conference" was organised to bring knowledge from different parts of the organisation together.

"Research exists as a mist throughout the organisation and is part of many jobs. We need to bring everyone together to learn from each other and enhance synergy"



The Influencing Journey

The Evidence for Influencing conference addressed the role and use of research in different parts of the “Influencing Journey”, as each part of this journey requires different types of research. First, we need to know *what* needs to change: policies and practices, and related attitudes and behaviours of people. This could be informed by desk studies by policy advisors, public opinion research and scorecards and rankings, e.g. of companies. Secondly, we need to know *who* has the power to make the change, and who and what influences them. This can be governments, the private sector or the general public. This involves stakeholder analyses, power analyses and perception research to see what the public thinks and which groups of people are receptive to Oxfam’s message and how they should be targeted. Thirdly, we need to know *how* to achieve change: what works, when, where and why (or why not). This involves testing the Theories of Change and related assumptions of programs and campaigns through, for example meta-reviews and synthesis studies, and monitoring results along the way (e.g., through outcome harvesting) and adapting strategies accordingly. In all of this Oxfam needs to understand the *context* in which they are trying to achieve change. Next, Irene shared several examples of evidence-informed campaigns, such as the inequality campaign ‘Even it up’; the Fair Tax Monitor; and the use of killer facts, which are very explicit and easy to grasp numbers that can ‘kill off’ the opposition’s arguments.

Tensions and challenges

When conducting and commissioning research, it can be a challenge to balance ambitious research strategies with available resources, like staff capacity and funding. How can we do what we want to do with the resources that we have? And how can we ensure good-quality findings that are relevant and useful for the programs and campaigns? Using evidence to influence policy makers is also not without its difficulties. Evidence is vital, but rarely sufficient to achieve change. It needs to be credible, well-timed, carefully framed and communicated, propositional (solution-oriented) and supported by other strategies like public pressure as part of a package.

“Evidence is vital, but rarely sufficient to achieve change. It needs to be credible, well-timed, carefully framed and communicated, propositional (solution-oriented) and supported by other strategies like public pressure as part of a package.”

Effective evidence

So is evidence always the answer? By itself, it is not. It is clear that trying to convince people with evidence doesn’t necessarily work.

Instead, in post-truth contexts we should try to reach the hearts and minds of people through storytelling. Irene added that listening is also important: what do people think? For this reason, Oxfam commissions and conducts perception research as input for communication and campaign strategies. Irene concluded her keynote with some recommendations:

- Build partnerships, networks and alliances: don’t stay in your own silo.
- Strengthen capacity of partner organisations: they know the context and implement activities.
- Fundraise for research in programmes and campaigns: research will then be directly relevant and applied.
- Knowledge management and uptake of findings: look around, maybe someone already has the answer to your question. Share your findings with others.
- Stimulate an organisational culture with room for innovation.
- Strategic communication: with decision-making based on research to enhance effectiveness.
- Improve research quality: find a pragmatic solution to get to results that are credible.
- Focus on specific topics and ensure that research is relevant and applied.

Get in touch: Email: Irene.deGoede@oxfamnovib.nl | Twitter: [@idegoede](https://twitter.com/idegoede) | Website: [oxfamnovib.nl | policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/](https://oxfamnovib.nl/policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/) | Slides and video: tinyurl.com/yaa6dran

3 Workshops

3.1 Day 1, Round 1

3.1.1 Capturing most significant change stories with video in Ethiopia

Mirjam Schaap

Specialist in Knowledge management, ICT supported learning and communication, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (the Netherlands)

Tessa Steenbergen

Visual anthropologist and filmmaker, Tessasteenbergen.nl (the Netherlands)

Heidi van Groningen

Intern, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (the Netherlands)



The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is a qualitative and participatory form of monitoring & evaluation (M&E) that involves the collection, systematic selection, and analysis of stories describing reported changes from development activities and the most important project outcomes. It is ideally suited to providing qualitative information on project/programme impact. It is well suited to capture data on outcomes and impact in complex situations. It is also a good tool to foster programme adaptation and programme improvement. It is reportedly also a method which is useful when outcomes will vary widely across beneficiaries.

MSC has therefore been selected to help to assess the performance of BENEFIT and its programmes ISSD, CASCAPE, ENTAG and SBN. MSC is used complementary to other M&E methods to improve their appropriateness. The qualitative data resulting from the MSC, both the narratives of the stories and the criteria used by the storycircles to decide on the MSC story of the stories told, informs the BENEFIT Mid Term Review mission. At the same time, the learning resulting from the MSC results will help BENEFIT to share its learning with wider audiences, and to adapt its programmes where necessary and also inform choices for a potential new phase of BENEFIT.

We use video to record the selected significant change stories. In this way, the stories that MSC is able to uncover come to life on screen. The portability and accessibility of video promotes easy sharing and analysis of MSC stories and outcomes, peer-to-peer learning, and also allows easy involvement of illiterate stakeholders.

A process of conducting 24 storycircles, covering 9 stakeholder groups resulted in 24 Most Significant Change stories on changes related to the BENEFIT programmes primary outcomes.

During the workshop, a short introduction to the use of the MSC technique in BENEFIT was presented, and in three parallel group the MSC selection process was facilitated. Each group received transcripts of three MSC stories. After reading the transcripts, each group discussed on which was the MSC story and developed a list with criteria to use to decide on the selection the MSC. One of the chosen MSC stories, a farmer telling about starting a Papaya plantation, was screened. One of the lessons that the MSC team learned from this workshop was that stories from different stakeholder groups cannot be mixed in an MSC selection process, comparing the MSC on a policy change with a MSC on a livelihood change at farmer levels tends to lead to the latter being chosen as MSC story.

"The stories are captured as videos because it is a very portable and accessible format. It makes the stories come to life."

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3.1.2 Moving beyond quotes and anecdotes: Communicating qualitative evidence in evaluation

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In research and evaluation of development practices, qualitative analyses are often discounted as evidence of impact or causality, or are used to overlay participants' voices on top of quantitative findings. However, qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographies, can provide evidence of phenomena normally elusive to statistically based methods. When done in coordination with research and evaluation goals, and in collaboration with program staff, these analyses can provide insight into whether development programming are effective and/or sustainable. This case study of the Learn, Earn, and Save (LES) Initiative learning partnership between the Mastercard Foundation, the University of Minnesota and three NGOs that provided youth livelihoods training in East Africa, demonstrates how in-depth interview data was used as evidence to examine how youth were able to "get ahead" or simply "get by" after participation in the program. The presentation highlighted: how, instead of being secondary, qualitative data were at the forefront of analysis throughout the mixed-methods evaluation process; how findings were used to make programs more sustainable in the communities they served.

While there have been strong developments in visualizing and interpreting quantitative information, there is less guidance on how qualitative data can effectively be communicated. Examples from this project sparked discussion on how to effectively disseminate findings from qualitative or mixed-methods studies. We discussed how collaborative workshops and written reports conveyed qualitative and mixed methods findings to funders and program providers. Finally, we discussed how findings were used on multiple levels to influence programming changes, better support participants' needs, and drive conversations around youth livelihoods.

"There is less guidance on how qualitative data can effectively be communicated"

This workshop was built around engaging participants in two key questions. First: How might we reconceptualize "evidence" to move beyond reductive notions in which complex relationships are seen as a quantifiable relationships between a set of variables? Second: How can we communicate this more robust notion of "evidence" with diverse stakeholders in order to affect change?

In small groups, participants engaged with de-identified quantitative and qualitative project data to directly explore different "evidence" that emerged from the different types of data they examined. Following a large group debriefing on the small groups' analyses, small groups convened a second time to create various strategies for communicating findings to different stakeholders: the NGO implementing the programming, Funding partner, youth participants and community partners.

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3.1.3 Oxfam generating evidence from outcome harvesting monitoring data and using analysis for influencing

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Sanne Djojoseparto

Cultural anthropologist working at the Thematic Unit Food, Land and Water; key in analysing the outcome statements. Oxfam Novib (the Netherlands)

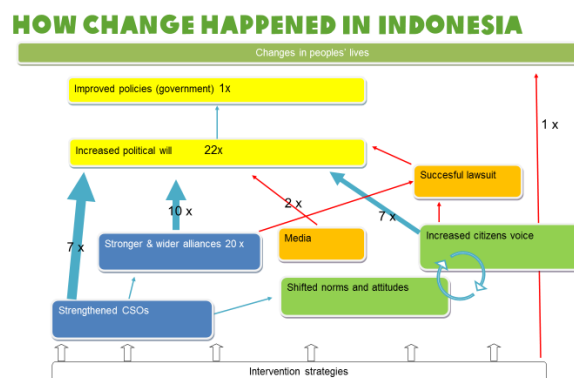
Case material Indonesia thanks to Widyanto Widyanto (Project leader, Oxfam Indonesia) and Ishma Soepriadi (MEL officer, Oxfam Indonesia).

An analysis of a set of outcome statements, harvested using the Outcome Harvesting methodology when monitoring results in an influencing program, can verify the Theory of Change, and thereby contribute to improving the program’s influencing strategy. That was the key message of the workshop. Oxfam presented initial results of its analysis of early and intermediate outcomes in the Strategic Partnership, Right to Food program (R2F). This analysis aimed to answer the question “How did these changes really happen, if compared to our generic Theory of Change?”. Which aspects of our Theory were confirmed by the results of the analysis? Which alternative routes, if any, did the analysis show towards expected results?

The workshop focused on Indonesian case material; this project aims at a set of interrelated policy changes: the revision of the Indonesian Land Law, the implementation of the Agrarian Reform, of the Laws on Protection and Empowerment of Farmers (LPEF), and of Fisherfolk and Salt Farmers (LPEFAS). Furthermore, district level policy changes are sought: the adoption of a Grievance mechanism.

This Indonesia analysis is part of Oxfam’s wider efforts to learn about mechanisms of change in influencing, across countries and themes. As Oxfam continues this analysis, it builds its global narrative, and communicates it for accountability and learning purposes.

Our analysis showed that most outcomes were in the outcome area ‘increased political will’ (22x). In line with our Theory of Change, increased political will was mostly preceded by ‘stronger and wider alliances’ (10x), ‘strengthened CSO’s’ (7x) and ‘increased citizen’s voice’ (7x). Next to confirming these pathways, the analysis also showed interesting alternative pathways to change: political will also came about with the media and a successful lawsuit (see red arrows in the picture).



In the Indonesia R2F team, this analysis triggered reflections on their influencing strategies. Outcome Harvesting helped them to overcome some of the challenges for MEL in influencing work, particularly “Causal Relationship”; “Changing Circumstances”, and “What does Success look like”. The analysis enhanced Oxfam Indonesia team’s “Reflection and understanding of their achievements and challenges in influencing work”. It increased their awareness of the different stages in influencing work, and of the importance of the outcome area ‘Stronger and Wider alliances’.

The interaction with the audience during the presentation showed a need among consultants for more knowledge on theory, MEAL specialists and project leaders were also curious about experiences.

After the presentation, Oxfam initiated a discussion with the participants on the opportunities and challenges participants experienced or expected when using evidence from harvested outcomes in influencing. Opportunities mentioned were: outcome harvesting is a participatory and flexible method which enables monitoring “difficult to measure” results, looks for evidence and contribution, and is useful for learning and reflection. Also stated were the opportunity to include the context, to harvest unexpected results, to share data, and to involve beneficiaries and media in the process. Challenges mentioned were a potential bias towards positive and expected changes, the need to validate outcomes, to focus the analysis, for context sensitivity (elections for example), and for caution in dealing with sensitive information. Other challenges were ensuring comparability, aggregation of data, and quantification of these qualitative data. Final concerns were the acceptance of the methodology by other stakeholders (e.g. less progressive donors, partners etc.) and the labour intensity of the methodology.

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3.2 Day 1, Round 2

3.2.1 Communicating evidence for a variety of stakeholders – the case of Benefit-SBN in Ethiopia

Anteneh Mekuria

Assistant Manager and Communication, Extension and Training Coordinator, Benefit-SBN (Ethiopia)

Anteneh first presented a brief background on Benefit-SBN. He touched upon its location (Northwest Ethiopia) and the products on which it focuses (sesame and rotation crops). He also highlighted the goal, objectives, main services and facilities of the programme. With pictures from the field, he showed the sesame value chain in the country and how it proceeds outside the country.



Afterwards, he posed three questions and asked participants to discuss in groups and share their experiences. The questions were: How do you communicate evidence effectively to diversified audiences? How do you select communication tools? What are the challenges and opportunities you face in communicating evidence? Some participants reflected their experience in the plenary.

In communicating evidence via impact stories, framing is one of the most important issues.

In journalism it is said: "The death of one individual is a tragedy, whereas the death of millions is statistics."

I think this quote shows the importance of qualitative stories for communicating evidence.

Then Anteneh briefed on the communication strategy of Benefit-SBN and presented three different examples of how Benefit-SBN communicated evidence to the various stakeholders of the SBN. The examples included communications made on 20 Steps sesame production, reducing post-harvest loss; financial literacy and availing market and weather information. They helped to show how Benefit-SBN communicates evidence to farmers, policy makers and other stakeholders. They also helped to show how evidence gained through research and field observations have been used for internal learning and decision-making purposes.

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3.2.2 How to develop effective and attractive case studies

Roger Reuver

Owner, RCO Design (the Netherlands)

Joost Guijt

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There is a need for good case studies in order to learn effectively from Inclusive AgriBusiness (IAB) initiatives, and make those learnings accessible and appealing to others. Yet existing case studies are often incomplete, poorly analysed, and unattractively presented. In this workshop we presented and discussed a more structured approach to developing case studies that:

- is strong in business analysis
- allows comparability between cases
- integrates text, visuals & video
- is presented attractively
- offers multiple outputs for multiple audiences

Fieldwork for the case studies should take 3-4 days. Target budget is €20.000 - €25.000: anything less is a story, not a case study.

Our anticipated audiences for IAB case studies include businesses, partners collaborating on IAB initiatives, public sector actors funding IAB pilots or innovation, researchers and consultants.

Key to this approach to case studies is information layering. The first layer is about "getting the idea" – what the reader picks up on after a couple of minutes, using information that is easy to scan and inspirational. The second layer is about "getting the picture", which adds key points and conclusions for the interested reader. Browsing this layer takes about 10 minutes, and can contain more text or a short video. The final layer is about "getting the details", allowing for more comparison and conceptual development. It is based on deeper analysis and links to more information.

"A case study is a collaborative process and should not be focused solely on producing outputs."

A six step production process to create products that cater to this different information needs was explained and discussed, followed by the example of [Making Vegetable Markets Work for Smallholders Myanmar](#). We are interested in hearing other experiences with structured case studies and welcome exchange on effective approaches.

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3.2.3 Theatre for gathering and communicating evidence

Riti Hermán Mostert

Multi Stakeholder Partnership Advisor, WCDI (the Netherlands)

Theatre Action Research is a method to gather evidence in a participatory manner, whereby the agenda for research can also be developed in collaboration with participants. The workshop started with an introduction on Paolo Freire, Augusto Boal and James Thompson to explain the methodology of learning, interacting with participants and the development of theatre as a tool for dialogue, social change, research and decision making or development of legislation.



Practically, the method was used to explore current themes with participants, through which several current issues and problems could be expressed. Through an interactive group process the participants could choose which issues to explore further. This could result in the joint development of a research agenda.

During the workshops this was done based on exercises inspired by "Theatre of the Oppressed", by Augusto Boal. By developing 'tableaux vivants' and by interpreting these with the participants several issues came up. One of these issues was 'Racism'. In the scene that was developed, one of the participants described and acted out how he would be picked from each line at airport check points. Together with the participants this image (with 'living statues') was created expressing the issue Racism. The dramatic expression, as well as the conversations that take place create a platform, common ground for a joint and action oriented research agenda. At the same time the group process, mutual learning and developing empathy in the group can be seen as an intervention, referring to the 'Action' in Theatre Action Research.



"We can interpret the ideas and views of people we are working with through theatre."

Participants mentioned that particularly for vulnerable topics, but also with groups that need more support in expression and advocating for their issues this method would be useful. Watching the theatre work of a group is impactful. The use of theatre for communicating evidence, both within a group as well as to society as a whole is therefore widely acknowledged. Participants were inspired to use theatre for process work, as well as for communicating to decision makers about the real lived issues of communities.

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3.3 Day 2, Round 3

3.3.1 Communicating the value of an intervention: What does Value for Money look like and how can it influence donors?

Julien Colomer

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Presenting on behalf of the authors: Julien Colomer, Alejandro A. Imbach, Leander Raes, Ursula Parrilla, Florian Reinhard, Manuela Fernandez and Melissa Allemant



Demonstrating Value for Money is an increasingly important condition of funding among major grant makers (e.g. DFID, Norad), yet many grantees struggle to convincingly plan for, assess and communicate the value of their interventions to current and prospective funders. This is especially the case for short interventions seeking longer term impacts in complex and dynamic contexts. In these settings, what constitutes Value for Money? How can it be assessed in practical terms? How should the results be communicated to donors and other target audiences? What risks do we run in assessing Value for Money? What do we risk if we cannot effectively communicate the value of our interventions?

Drawing from recent Value for Money assessments of IUCN's contribution to Forest Landscape Restoration processes in Guatemala and El Salvador, this interactive workshop engaged participants in exploring the following key issues:

- Defining Value for Money: Ensuring grant maker – grantee alignment on core concepts
- Key steps in assessing Value for Money: practical steps, assumptions, limitations and quality of evidence
- Communicating Value for Money to donors: key elements of a compelling and robust case

For more information see <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/47643>

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3.3.2 Ensuring results with Experience Capitalization

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“Experience capitalisation” refers to the process by which projects or programmes (or a general “experience” which is part of them) is described and analysed in detail, and from which lessons are drawn, shared and used to improve development interventions. It is an approach that helps identify specific innovations and practices, and understand the reasons behind success or failure. One of the main benefits of an experience capitalization process is that it can help provide concrete evidence, supporting advocacy efforts. The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) is implementing a project which aims to facilitate the adoption of this approach within rural development initiatives, and with it help improve the analysis, documentation, sharing and the adoption and use of lessons and good practices. This is a three-year project which is being implemented in different parts of the world, together with FAO, IICA and IFAD.

The session started with a short plenary presentation, sharing general information about the project, its main activities and results. During the past two years we have worked with approximately 250 participants, all of them representing more than 100 projects and organizations. We are now editing the documents prepared by all of them – all of which present the main lessons learnt. But in addition to discussing the benefits of this approach and the opportunities for generating evidence from the field, we were interested in looking at the main factors which, from a communications perspective, can support the adoption of the lessons learnt with each process. In particular, we wanted to focus on:

- i. the tools and steps to select the best products and channels to reach and engage with the main target audience;
- ii. the necessary steps for engaging participants on a long-term basis (e.g. with the organization and facilitation of an international community of practice); and
- iii. the role played by local “champions” and local facilitators.

We organized a “world café” session, with three groups discussing each theme simultaneously for approximately ten minutes, and then rotating into the next group (with one participant taking notes and sharing them with the next group). In terms of products and channels, participants highlighted the need to organise “exchange events” which, in an informal setting, could involve different persons.

The recommended using posters or simple documents, but also short videos, as something that does not require specific tools or skills (only a mobile phone). They also recommended identifying and mobilising a group of “gossipers’ within each network.

“Demonstrate the benefits. If it suits a need, people will share it automatically.”

In order to engage participants on a long-term basis, the group recommended clearly showing the benefits of an experience capitalization approach, and also showing that it contributes to an organization’s major goals or objectives. They felt it is necessary to have concrete assignments, for which it may be necessary to provide incentives. But it is also necessary to have a moderator in each group, or a “steward” who regularly interacts with the members of a group.

Last, participants also recognised the need to assign time and resources to train those who can play the role of “champions”, although acknowledging that staff turnover can be a serious problem. They recommended using new platforms (such as Facebook or Whatsapp groups) for exchanging information, but also organising regular events, with specific roles and responsibilities.

The session finished with a new plenary discussion, where we collected the main issues raised in each group and the opinions of all participants.

For more information, see tinyurl.com/yamc3t6h

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3.3.3 Using Mixed Methods to Strengthen Your Impact Story: An Interactive Workshop

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Oxfam Novib, the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation and Wageningen Economic Research wrote a working paper describing and analysing their experiences in using mixed methods in monitoring and evaluation. This paper shows how using mixed methods can help capture the full impact story. It also shows how building a more convincing narrative with mixed methods can help to influence decision making and increase the potential for transformational change.

During the conference, case studies from WEcR, WCDI, and Oxfam Novib were presented, showing the application of five mixed methods designs as defined by Creswell & Clark, 2010⁶. With the audience, they reflected on whether communication of the findings from mixed method studies is different than for regular monitoring and evaluation findings. They showed how findings of mixed method research can be used effectively for communication and informing strategic direction. Do’s and don’ts were presented of how to use mixed methods for answering evaluative questions and communicate them effectively.

⁶ Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010. Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research, 2nd edition

In conclusion, mixed method evaluations fit to the complexity of development projects and contexts. Communicating mixed method findings is a continuous, iterative, and reflective process, with a focus on learning. Mixed methods evaluation findings better serve the different needs and purposes of evaluation of multiple stakeholders involved. They communicate a more comprehensive picture of the social change process under evaluation.

The working paper will be published soon at the [WCDI website](#), [WEcR website](#) and [Oxfam Novib website](#)

Communicating mixed method findings is a continuous, iterative, and reflective process, with a focus on learning.

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3.4 Day 2, Round 4

3.4.1 "Empathic evaluation" - can a better understanding of the policymaking process enhance the use of evaluation evidence?

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With global issues at stake and an increased demand of citizens for effective policy outcomes, 'evidence-informed policymaking' has entered the spotlights. This is also echoed in the development cooperation's evaluation systems, focusing increasingly on the strategic questions of development, and on the role of evaluation (units) in learning and knowledge brokering.

Evidence encounters turbulent times, as both the demand for evidence, and the contestation over evidence have increased. In parallel, insights on how to improve the use of evidence for policymaking are rapidly evolving. Both evolutions concern the evaluation community.

There is little doubt on the usefulness of evidence for policymaking. Nonetheless, enhancing the use of evidence remains challenging. Why is this so? This question is explored from the perspective of policymaking. The starting point is that evaluation evidence is considered as a service to policymakers, which requires in turn empathy towards the policymaking needs.

Understanding the use of evidence in policymaking

The prevailing paradigm for evidence-informed policymaking, is of rational-technocratic nature. In this paradigm, the policy process consists of several stages, that are each 'managed'. Policy decisions are based on ratio and depend on the availability of the 'best' evidence (with evidence being classified in hierarchies of robustness).

Evidence is developed free from political influence. Roughly, the use of evidence in policymaking is considered as a tube where you put evidence in, and a policy decision flows out. Although this rational-technocratic paradigm is still dominant, there is an increased understanding that real-world policymaking is a matter of craftsmanship, as expressed in the politicised and relational paradigm. In this paradigm, the use of evidence is a matter of trade-offs between competing values, beliefs and interests rather than of ratio. The paradigm recognises the politics of policymaking; it's a democratic debate in which evidence is used to negotiate who gets what, when and how. Politics also has an influence on the development and the use of evidence. There is no 'best' evidence, the focus is on appropriate evidence, and appropriate use of evidence.

Empathic evaluation and evidence-informed policymaking

In the evaluation community, efforts to enhance the use of evaluation evidence are generally depicted as a matter of 'bridging a gap' between the evidence-side and the policymaking-side. This over-simplified model does not match with the craftsmanship nature of policymaking which calls for frequent interactions between evidence-providers and policymakers in order to strengthen the use of evidence. We call therefore for an interactive model that is neither getting away from the fact that policymaking and evaluation are two different realms with distinct modus operandi, nor from the

relational-politicised nature of policymaking. An interaction model demands evaluation processes that are open to this interaction; this model also recognises that evidence is neither free from politics, nor from different types of biases. An interaction model also focuses on appropriate evidence and on appropriate use of evidence, rather than on 'robust' evidence. An interaction model echoes the non-linearity between evidence and policy-decisions; new evidence often leads to evolving understandings of policy-issues rather than to a policy-decision that 'solves' an issue.

The debate on evidence-informed policymaking is vivid in the policymaking community with rapidly evolving insights from cross-disciplinary contributions. This concerns the evaluation community as well. Can an increased understanding of policymaking enhance the use of evaluation evidence? The exploration of this question may not be answered, however, it may have led to evolving understandings.

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3.4.2 "I want to tell you a story": Rigorous, comprehensive, and accessible methods for reporting results

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Pencils of Promise (PoP) is a global learning organization that aims to sustainably impact students, teachers, and communities in Ghana, Guatemala, and Laos. We pride ourselves in relying on rigorous and mixed methods data to inform the development and evolution of our programmatic efforts in the Global South. Simultaneously, PoP prioritizes innovation and program flexibility to meet the needs of the communities in which we work, thus promoting a highly applied and empathetic approach to evaluation. A critical piece of the program evaluation cycle is communicating the outcomes of our work with both internal and external audiences. Just as we push for informed and effective change in our programs, when necessary, our data reporting and communication strategy has grown with the demands for readability, accessibility, and frequency. We've left behind the time consuming, and often unread, yearly evaluation reports for focused stories, told through data, of our impact on education. We've leaned on all of our teams to increase the frequency of internal conversations to avoid the trappings of siloed and tunnel vision strategies. We strive to become a louder voice in the global education community by sharing our successes and failures with full transparency, and bringing together a diverse group of industry experts to contribute to the conversation.

During the workshop, PoP's approach and tools were presented to the audience. This included the organization's five channels for sharing results. While some of these sources are for internal purposes only (e.g., Salesforce and Product Fact Sheets), our external results sharing platforms (e.g., PoP website, Tableau page, and Transparency Talk) are all fed from the same data source: Salesforce. PoP's impact, development, and operations data are all housed within Salesforce, which provides the most live updates possible for everyone in the organization. For example, when data is collected in Ghana on a tablet, data collected will be immediately uploaded to Salesforce once the tablet reaches a Wi-Fi connection.

Participants in the workshop discussed the importance of storytelling throughout an organization, especially in terms of bringing together evaluation and communications teams. We also discussed the benefits of getting away from a typical annual reporting structure and looking for ways to provide internal and external audiences with frequent, high-quality results. This improves programming through adaptation and troubleshooting, while keeping external communications current.

Having a straightforward and streamlined data source means that everyone in the organization, and those who follow externally, are all looking at the same numbers. It provides high levels of consistency across conversations and keeps everyone on the same page of the story we're telling.

For more information see PoP's [results](#), [Tableau page](#), and [Transparency Talk](#).

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3.4.3 Join our house of colours and make a quantum leap from evidence to action

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The gap between *evidence* and *action* is a known challenge to achieving longer-term, sustainable development. We address one side of this challenge: many angles that are at work when evidence is presented to key stakeholders. We accept the diversity of stakeholders' opinions and streamline their conflicting interests to get to the joint action.

We developed a methodology to facilitate a successful translation of evidence into decisions through a process of learning and building ownership. This methodology of *learning/sense-making event*, which we use at the end of an evaluation, is based on a combination of creativity strategy, developed by Robert Dilts in 1994, and Dixon's Organizational Learning Cycle. After a presentation of evidence, the *learning/sense-making event* methodology takes participants through four specific thinking styles in



turn: (1) generating ideas, (2) evaluating ideas, (3) criticizing, and (4) coming up with a plan of action. During this process, the rational, emotional/intuitive, positive, critical, creative, and practical perspectives are streamlined and build on each other. The methodology builds on Dixon's hallways of learning: dialogue not speeches, egalitarianism, multiple perspectives, and shared experience.

We believe you can ensure broader commitment for transformative changes in your organisation and programme by going through four stages of learning from validating and reflection on evidence to decision making (growth and planning), combining multiple perspectives of stakeholders that are a balanced representation of interest and influences in the programme.

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3.5 Day 2, Round 5

3.5.1 Evidence gathering and communication on complex transformations through lobby/advocacy

Hanneke Post

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Masja Helmer

Head of Communications, Both ENDS (the Netherlands)



Both ENDS presented a case in which they had been lobbying with partners for years to encourage

development banks to apply stricter social and environmental regulations when financing projects. When certain activities or interventions by Both ENDS result in important changes, such as a new or changed policy, a sustainable management model, a certain practice or a new way of thinking, Both ENDS calls this a transformative story. This work does not necessarily fall within one of Both ENDS' projects, but is more overarching and contributes to the overall mission of the organization. Achieving a success or a shift in a certain area sometimes takes years and is often the result of several small interventions on various levels and from different projects. This makes it difficult to determine exactly which steps contributed to the success, let alone say with certainty what impact they have had.

Gathering evidence for and communicating transformative stories was the topic of discussion during this interactive session. The audience consisted of around 20 persons. These are some of the conclusions:

The timeline and the communication on the Both ENDS website can be considered partial evidence, but it would need verification by other actors to gain strength. Articles on the website and a timeline of the events and interventions show how lobby/advocacy efforts bring certain topics to the attention of, for example policy makers. Furthermore, they give an idea of how interventions are progressing. It was, however, clear one cannot really call it evidence without verification by actors other than those who initiate the interventions.

Other types of evidence would include seeing your terminology reflected in targets use, testimonies of different stakeholders and correspondence between Both ENDS and lobby/advocacy targets. For example, a request by a lobby target to provide input on a certain policy.

There are several M&E methods that would be suitable for collecting evidence. Outcome Harvesting, Process Tracing and Contribution Analysis were suggested. These methods are especially useful to give more insight in Both ENDS' contribution to certain changes. More 'traditional' methods such as conducting surveys or interviews were also mentioned. For continuous monitoring it was suggested to use a logbook in which you keep track of lobby/advocacy activities and keeping track of mentions in (social) media.

Good communication is of importance for learning purposes, to bring about change and for accountability reasons. For both employees and partners of Both ENDS it is important to find out how to work most effectively. Communication in itself can also help to bring about the desired system change. Furthermore, communication can show the added value of the organisation to donors and the general public. In the communication the right tone of voice should be used, open, non-violent communication that invites a dialogue. Good use of different social media is of importance for a good outreach but also personal one-on-one communication. Different audiences should be distinguished, such as partner or lobby targets.

"Communication in itself can bring about the desired system change"

For more information, see <https://tinyurl.com/yamp4tzn>

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3.5.2 The Road to Real-Time Monitoring: Increasing the Frequency of Measuring and Communicating Evidence

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This workshop showed how to use real-time monitoring for generating up-to-date impact evidence. It aimed to jointly determine actions needed to overcome challenges towards effective real-time impact monitoring, using a concrete case study on impact monitoring with and on two private sector development (PSD) support organisations.

To provide more relevant insights in impact of PSD programmes, a range of impact evaluation efforts have been initiated around the globe. A major Dutch initiative in this emerging field is the PRIME Partnership, a collaboration between two major Dutch PSD organizations and research institutes. PRIME stands for 'Pioneering Real-time Impact Monitoring and Evaluation', bringing together the two objectives of the programme: (1) developing a rigorous impact monitoring and evaluation methodology and (2) deliver results that assist CBI and PUM policy and implementation. For more information see www.primepartnership.nl.

During the course of PRIME, which started in 2014, many challenges have been overcome to deliver results that assist CBI and PUM policy and implementation and to find ways of communicating these results in a satisfactory manner. During the workshop we discussed six challenges of real-time evaluation for communicating results, and in teams of 3 to 6 people identified ways to overcome them.

*"Making clear choices on objectives",
"involving top management" and
"formulating dissemination strategies at
the start" were key words in the
workshops*

1. *How to align real-time evaluation with the changing information needs of organizations?* Three areas were identified as starting points: determine if it is for strategic or day-to-day management; have someone higher in the organisation embedded in the evaluation team; and have a preliminary "study" to determine the area of focus.
2. *How to organize fruitful interaction between researchers and policy makers?* Participants identified various good practices including ownership, dialogue from the start, building a theory of change together, and developing clear dissemination strategies.
3. *How to find a balance between regular updates and rigorous impact analysis?* Two challenges were identified. First, the frequency (it takes a long time, require updates); there should be tools to make updates more frequently. Second, the relevance for the client's customers, clients or beneficiaries can be improved.
4. *How to ensure that results are attractive & insightful for policy makers?* Participants discussed various ways to make this attractive but mostly highlighted the need for a clear dissemination strategy from the beginning, separating different types of audience and products.
5. *How to make sure that real-time evaluations have ownership in organizations?* Two key topics were identified. First, provide regular information in very simple language (not academic) and this information needs to clearly demonstrate their involvement. Second, good facilitators need to be involved who ensure dissemination among all actors.

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6. *How to ensure that real-time evaluations deliver input for strategic decisions?* Clear feedback mechanisms needs to be put in place. Also the information needs from different stakeholders need to be clarified at the start and regularly updated.

These discussions contribute to improve our joint ability as an evaluation community to communicate more effectively in real-time monitoring.

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3.5.3 Theory of Change as a framework for building and communicating evidence

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How can software help you build a learning culture around Theory of Change thinking? How can you make a Theory of Change a 'living, breathing, interactive and engaging document' instead of a one-time exercise?

These were some of the questions we explored. Particularly we looked at how an online tool called Changeroo can help achieve this and help bring Theory of Change thinking to the centre of managing societal value creation.

Changeroo is a new web-based tool that provides a solution for Theory of Change visualisation in a way that makes Theories of Change more interactive and grounded in co-creation. This facilitates engagement and makes a Theory of Change better suited for communication and joined learning and action.

Workshop participants enjoyed a live demo of the tool.

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4 Key insights

Throughout the conference, the main theme was: "Communicating Evidence for Sustainable Development". Conference participants were encouraged to explore three questions that were guiding the conference:

- What do we understand by 'evidence'?
- What are challenges and opportunities in the generation and use of evidence to influence sustainable development?
- What role can communication play in transformational change processes in general and in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development specifically?

The conference questions triggered discussions. During the last session of the conference, participants shared key insights and lessons from the conference in a World Cafe session in which six different perspectives on the theme were taken (based on the Thinking Hats of De Bono). They have been captured below. Reference is also made to the keynotes and workshops. This report is not trying to be conclusive but rather intends to provide insights and stimulate learning around the topic of communicating evidence for sustainable development. The range of presentations and discussions during the workshop provides ideas for further exploring the topic.



Figure 1 - Word cloud based on conference participants key learning. Generated using [Mentimeter.com](https://www.mentimeter.com).

Understand that evidence is contested

Evidence is contested and communicating evidence does not automatically lead to sustainable development. We assume that evidence generated through research or Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is used to inform strategic and operational decision-making, for policy-making, programme design or for learning to do a better job. But does this always happen? And how does this work? Do we understand evidence the same way? And do we really want the evidence that is generated by research and M&E?

"We are drowning in information while thirsting for wisdom". Nowadays it is difficult to select information that is useful for us. At the same time, the information that we are faced with may be fake, and we become distrustful of evidence. And whilst evidence can be generated rigorously, there are many factors at play that hinder its uptake. Evidence can be misused, changed, or corrupted for personal gain. Furthermore, we frame evidence from our own perspectives, without seeing the different angles. We may select positive evidence, oversimplify evidence or misrepresent evidence. At the same time, evidence can be phrased as mainly quantitative, whilst there is a need to use mixed methods and build up a powerful narrative (see also below).

Realise that evidence does not speak for itself

Both conference keynote speakers emphasised that evidence does not speak for itself. Noelle Aarts explained that what some groups consider to be true, may not resonate with other groups at all - depending on their framing of the issue at hand. She also showed a video example where facts clashed with emotions. Irene de Goede identified some conditions that need to be in place for effective communication of evidence: "It needs to be credible, well-timed, carefully framed and communicated, propositional (solution-oriented) and supported by other strategies".

Engage and generate useful evidence

Engage with the users of evidence to better understand their needs, wishes and context, so as to define what evidence needs to be generated and shared. Often, researchers, evaluation specialists and programme staff decide what evidence needs to be generated. But there is inadequate understanding of what evidence is really needed, and whether this fits the context of the intended users of this evidence, such as policymakers, or the general public. So, we need to think about who we want to influence. But also, do we understand who they are and what they need? Michael Quinn Patton already has extensively discussed this in his well-known 'utilisation focused evaluation'⁷: "*utilisation focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluation should be judged by the utility and actual use*" (Patton, 2008, p. 37). In other words, we need to generate useful evidence, that fits the context of those we would like to influence.

The workshop on "Empathic evaluation" indicated the need for researchers/evaluators to engage with policy makers on what is needed for evidence-informed policy-making, and we should keep in mind that "policymakers also have emotions". We need to understand each other better, and engage to be able to generate and communicate evidence for the purpose of sustainable development.

Value different perspectives and engage in dialogue

The word "evidence" is a variation on the word "evident", which means "obvious to the eye or mind"⁸. But what is obvious to one is not necessarily obvious to the other. Communication, especially dialogue, can support the connection between different perspectives. Just putting the facts out there may not be enough to achieve transformative change. Noelle Aarts' keynote was aptly named "Facts are facts, perceptions are reality". Perception is what determines our view of the world. And perception is selective. We cannot take in all the information that surrounds us, so we strategically choose based on what fits into our existing cognitive frames, which we construct in groups of likeminded people. To challenge our frames and to understand other groups, to bridge and not only to bond, dialogue is needed. Noelle Aarts provided us with five guidelines for dialogue: listen with attention and respect; recognise different truths; make underlying norms, assumptions and fears explicit; take emotions seriously, and be aware of identity and relational dynamics.

Have interdisciplinary teams

There is a need for different functions and disciplines to collaborate in teams, so as to generate and communicate useful evidence. In her keynote, Irene de Goede highlighted some of the tensions that researchers are subject to and which make it difficult for people to work together: working with different people, needs and targets, deadlines, a lack of resources, misinterpretation and distortion of the findings, and a lack of collaboration. She described research as "a mist in the organisation": many different types of job functions include some type of research. It is a challenge to integrate all these streams of information in a useful, effective way. But doing this needs to better evidence and better decision-making.

The importance of bridging, as opposed to just bonding, described by keynote speaker Noelle Aarts, calls for people to work together in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary teams. This will help to tackle complex issues that need to be addressed by different disciplines and people that can bridge between different disciplines and perspectives.

⁷ Patton, M.Q. (2008) Utilization-Focused Evaluation, 4th edition, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California

⁸ evidence | Definition of evidence in English by Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.). Retrieved June 27, 2018, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/evidence>

Mix methods and build up a powerful narrative



Figure 2 - One of Oxfam's Killer Facts

Combining a mix of quantitative and qualitative M&E/research methods, as well as a mix of communication methods can help to build a powerful narrative. You need to have an a story to tell to convince people to change. Irene de Goede shared how Oxfam can use 'killer facts' to influence different stakeholders (e.g., companies) to change behaviour and practices.

At the same time, we need qualitative information to help tell a compelling story. Various workshops focused on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and underlined the importance of qualitative methods, often inadequately valued. The workshop "[Using Mixed Methods to Strengthen Your Impact Story](#)" indicated how mixed methods can support effective communication so as to inform strategic directions. The

workshop "[Moving beyond quotes and anecdotes: Communicating qualitative evidence in evaluation](#)" highlighted that qualitative information is not limited to being used to overlay participants' voices on top of quantitative data, and called for a reconceptualisation of the term "evidence". The definition of evidence was also reflected upon in an interactive workshop on "[Evidence gathering and communication on complex transformations through lobby/advocacy](#)". For lobby/advocacy efforts, stories may be the only way of sharing the changes that you have worked on – but when can you call this evidence? The workshop "[I want to tell you a story: Rigorous, comprehensive and accessible methods for reporting results](#)" featured innovative approaches and tools for strategic evidence communication, focused on frequent, high-quality evidence. The workshop "[Communicating evidence for a variety of stakeholders: the case of Benefit-SBN](#)" showed that different stakeholders have different information needs that should be met using a variety of communication methods to communicate both quantitative as well as qualitative evidence. In order to create a case for donors, being able to communicate Value for Money is compelling. The workshop "[Communicating the value of an intervention: What does Value for Money look like and how can it influence donors?](#)" discussed this concept and defined practical steps toward a robust case. All in all, having robust evidence based on mixed methods research/M&E, and building up a compelling story using a mix of methods is crucial in influencing sustainable development.

Encourage shared learning and sense-making

Stimulating shared learning is crucial for informed decision-making, and communication can play a crucial role in this. The outcome harvesting methodology was presented as a way of informing a programme's influencing strategy in the workshop "[Oxfam generating evidence from outcome harvesting monitoring data and using analysis for influencing](#)". Experience Capitalization is another approach to help identify specific innovations and practices, and understand the reasons behind success or failure, which was discussed in the workshop "[Ensuring results with Experience Capitalization](#)". A methodology to facilitate translation from evidence into decisions through a process of learning and building ownership was introduced in the workshop "[Join our house of colours and make a quantum leap from evidence to action](#)". Communication can support the process of shared learning and sense making for informed decision-making, and this calls for a safe space to dialogue, and organisational culture of learning, leadership support and commitment to change, more and more supported by digital learning platforms.

Integrate communication early for learning, sense-making and decision-making

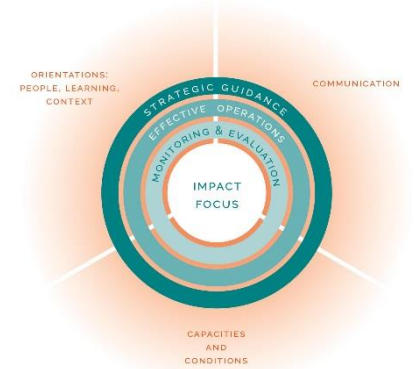
Communication needs to be integrated in the processes of generating evidence, sense-making and sharing of evidence to influence sustainable development. The framework from Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WC DI) on Managing for Sustainable Development Impact (M4SDI)⁹ indicates that communication needs to be integrated in all of the planning, implementation and M&E processes, so as to enhance impact. This involves integrating communication functions from the start, and engaging in dialogue from the start, so as to generate useful evidence, and make sense of the evidence generated.

In many cases, the communications department only becomes involved when the M&E/research findings are ready for dissemination. The conference provided some compelling cases to adapt this way of working, and to integrate communication from the planning phase. The case from Both ENDS showed how the M&E officer and the publications officer worked hand in hand in the generation and use of evidence. Both functions have a valuable role to play.

In her keynote, Irene de Goede shared an example of how Oxfam listens to its audience from the beginning through public opinion research in order to decide what needs to change, as well as perception research to see what the public thinks and which groups of people are receptive to Oxfam's message.

Qualitative, learning-oriented methods can play a role in integrating communication in M&E/research from the start, and encouraging learning and sense making. The workshop "Theatre for gathering and communicating evidence" presented theatre as a way to connect with participants on sensitive issues such as racism. In the workshop "Capturing most significant change stories with video in Ethiopia", the use of video as a communication tool is embedded in the qualitative M&E process of collecting stories. The workshop "How to develop effective and attractive case studies" also provided concrete indications on how to embed communication from the design of a case study, and provided an example of a researcher/evaluator working hand-in-hand with a communications expert. The workshop "The Road to Real-Time Monitoring: Increasing the Frequency of Measuring and Communicating Evidence" featured the presentation of a case to spark discussion on how real-time monitoring results can be most effectively communicated during the process of implementation, for strategic and operational decision-making.

Finally, the workshop "Theory of Change as a framework for building and communicating evidence" offered a way of building a learning culture around Theory of Change thinking through an online tool that can stimulate co-creation, shared learning and strategic decision-making. There are plenty of opportunities to integrate communication in the generation and use of evidence for sustainable development.



⁹ Kusters, C.S.L. and Batjes, K. with Wigboldus, S., Brouwers, J. and Baguma, S.D. (2017) Managing for Sustainable Development Impact: An Integrated Approach to Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Wageningen: Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3362/9781780449807>

Appendix 1 Conference participants

First Name	Surname	Organisation	Nationality
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Nele	Claeys		BELGIUM
Jelle	Goossens		BELGIUM
Myriam	Van Parijs	Enabel - Belgian Development Agency	BELGIUM
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Gentil	Kambale Kavusa	World Wide Fund For Nature	CONGO DEMOCRATIC REP OF
Solveig	Danielsen	CABI	DENMARK
Anteneh Mekuria	Tesfaye	Benefit-Sbn (Sesame Business Network)	ETHIOPIA
Petteri	Lammi	Saana Consulting	FINLAND
Sylvie Corinne Jeanine	Desilles	East-West Seed	FRANCE
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Soja	Sekharan		INDIA
Tanurina	Datta	The Hunger Project	INDIA
Siti	Humaira	Wageningen University	INDONESIA
Krishan	Bheenick	CTA	MAURITANIA
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Prem Kumar	Pokhrel	Alternative Energy Promotion Centre	NEPAL
Neha	R.C.	Center For Agriculture & Environmental Research And Development (Caerd)	NEPAL
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Anita	Adhikari	Ministry of Population	NEPAL
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Amrit	Lamsal	Office Of The District Coordination Office, 6 No Province, Surkhet	NEPAL
Suraj	Acharya	Relief Nepal	NEPAL
Poonam	Pant Bhatta	Rwssfdb	NEPAL
Surendra	Bhattarai	Strengthening The National Rural Transport Program	NEPAL
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Dirk R.	Frans		NETHERLANDS
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Loes	van Dijk	AgriProFocus	NETHERLANDS
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Christiane	van Ophem	Global Reporting Initiative	NETHERLANDS
Charlotte	Floors	IUCN NL	NETHERLANDS
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Karen	Batjes	Kb Consulting	NETHERLANDS
Marga	Janse	Majas Connexion	NETHERLANDS
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Susana Delos Santos	Santiago	National Economic And Development Authority	PHILIPPINES
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Tomasz	Kozakiewicz	Fundacja SolidarityFilmDoc	POLAND
Gavin	Bretteny	Association of Christian Schools International	SOUTH AFRICA
Safaa Mohammed	Ahmed	Safaa Research	SUDAN
Andrea	Gros		SWITZERLAND
Julien	Colomer	IUCN	SWITZERLAND
Chien-Yao	Tseng	International Cooperation And Development Fund	TAIWAN
Ekkapong	Saenwan	East-West Seed	THAILAND
Chitrapon	Vanaspongse	Independent Consultant	THAILAND
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Maris Stella Nancy	Kaawe	International Fund For Agricultural Development (Ifad)	UGANDA
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Matron	Muleya	Zubo Trust	ZIMBABWE

To explore
the potential
of nature to
improve the
quality of life



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WCDI-18-012

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