

ACTING ON WHAT WE KNOW AND HOW WE LEARN FOR CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

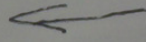


March 5-6, 2013
Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK
Learning theme: How to learn from climate change evaluations in and between organizations
(CDKN, GEF EO, IDS)

Will a theory based approach in evaluations enable learning from evaluations?



Evaluation as a continuous process of informing strategic thinking rather than one of accountability



The Global Knowledge for Global Change is an event to bring together four different strands or 'framing cases' which all relate to an overarching learning theme in relation with the focus of the event: 'acting on what we learn for climate and development policy'.

THEMES

- 1 **Whose knowledge counts?** Locally held knowledge for climate change adaptation (IDS & CCAFS)
- 2 **Brokers, translators and intermediaries:** New roles and challenges for putting knowledge into practice (IDRC, IDS, USAID)
- 3 **How to learn from climate change evaluations in and between organizations** (CDKN & GEF EO)
- 4 **Extreme events and disaster risk reduction:** What are we not learning? (IDS)

The structure of the conference follows a social learning experience and knowledge exchange using a triple learning-loop approach.

Instrumental learning

Acquiring new knowledge

Communicative learning

Understanding/ reinterpreting knowledge through communication with others

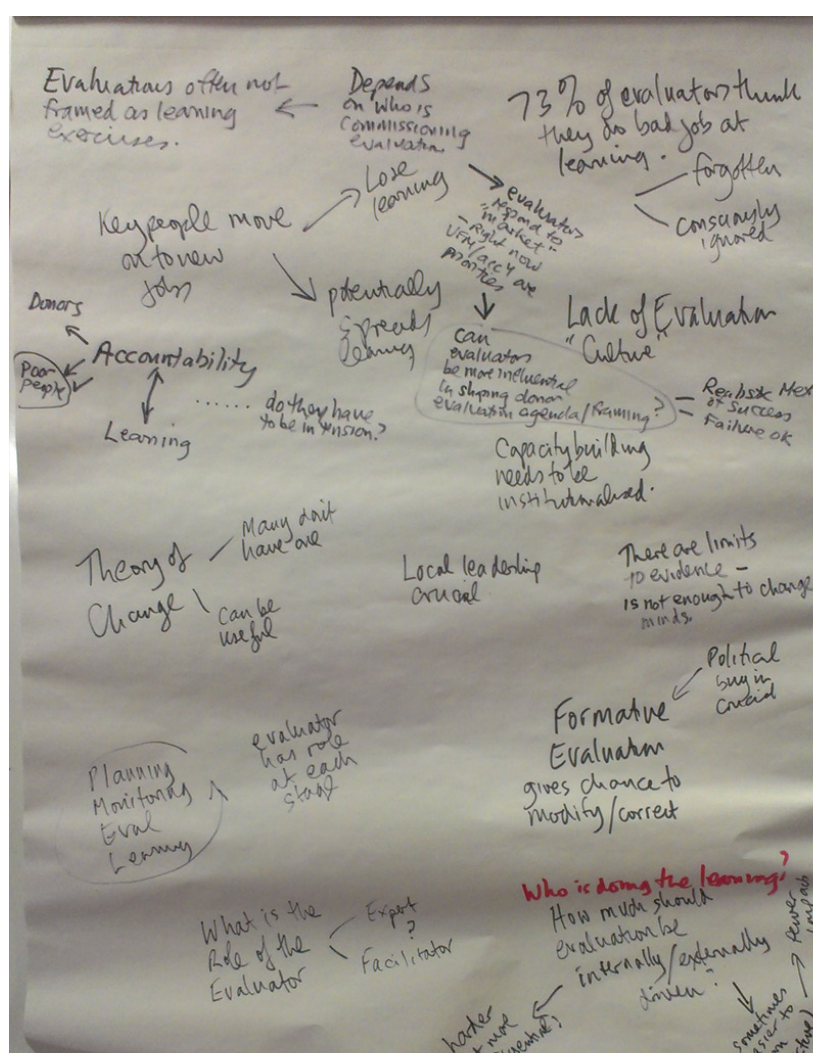
Transformative learning

examining underlying assumptions leading to change in attitudes and social norms and collective action, ideally

The session began with Rob D. van den Berg introducing ideas around relationship between accountability and evaluation. The word 'formative evaluation' was pronounced which was referred to as a forward-looking type of evaluation.

After an introductory note, the session started off with a storytelling circle. The participants were divided into two groups and 5-6 stories from each group were first shared within the group followed by a discussion amongst the whole group on the learning drawn from the stories that were shared. Each story was based on a particular evaluation related learning event that highlighted an obstacle or would show a potential way forward.

The following picture shows the kind of cloud diagram that was an outcome of the storytelling session from **Group 1** and the following bulleted points are the highlights from their session.



- Story of a project from this session highlighted how formative evaluation gave time and space for learning to take place and the lessons learnt were adopted in the next phase of the project. This example was considered rare.

- Overall, understanding of the group was that learning was indeed taking place but there were questions floating around 'who is listening to that learning' and 'how far is it going to go'.

- According to a recent survey, as quoted by one of the participants of the group, 73% of the people agreed that the learning aspect of monitoring and evaluation process within an organization was very often forgotten.

- The group observed that evaluation was not always framed as a learning exercise and they felt that a reason behind this was that it majorly depended on who is commissioning the process. Many evaluators react to the process similar to how they would respond to the market.

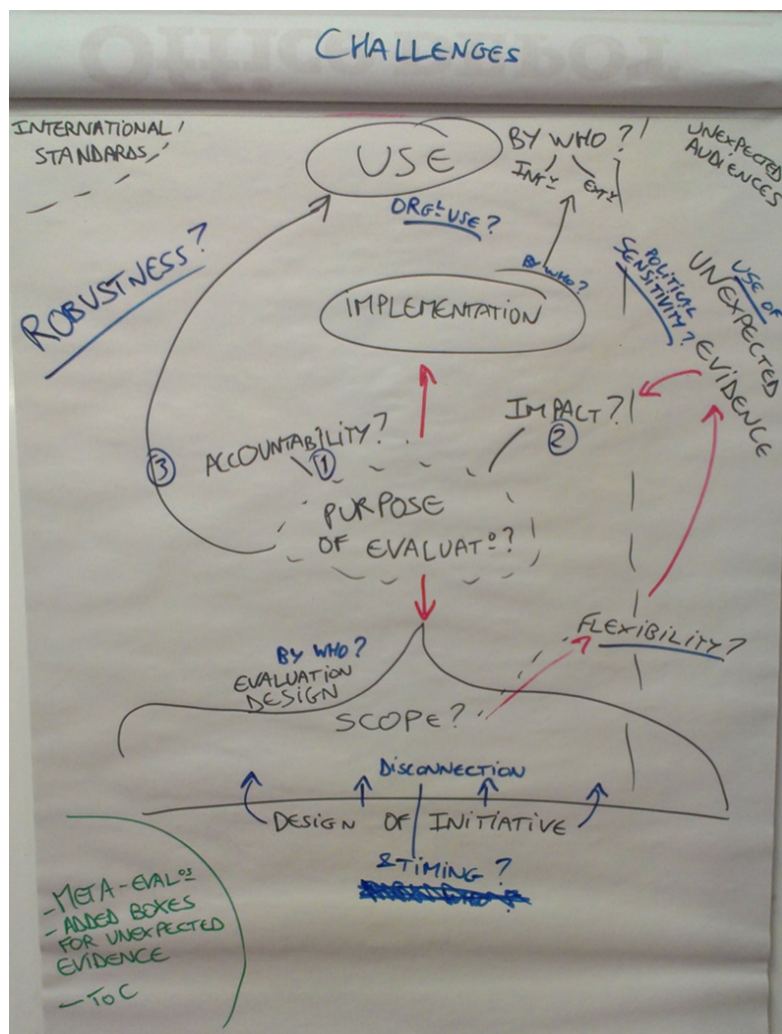
- Theory of change was viewed as a realistic door for holistic view. The idea of looking at failures as constructive events and creating realistic matrices of success with learning as a practice rather than an outcome, were delved upon.

- It was mentioned that evaluators could be recognized as wearing different hats during the different stages of the evaluation cycle, sometimes as experts and as facilitators at others.

- Accountability was flagged as the final important point as part of the learning spectrum.

The following picture shows a mind map that was an outcome of the storytelling session from **Group II** and the following bulleted points are the highlights from their session.

- The central idea from the group emerged as to have learning from the unexpected side. Through the design of the initiative/project to its evaluation to implementation to its use, there are a lot of variations that can happen. Thus, there is a pressing need for flexibility in the evaluation design and a requirement to address our preparedness for unexpected occurring that require evidence.
- Recognizing the use of evaluation is very important with respect to the different kind of audiences – internal/ external/ unexpected. The interest is to influence other actors with the results of this evaluation. Where are the boundaries set for our evaluation actions? The need is to look at broader scheme of things with respect to climate change, which makes it both important and fuzzy.
- Who commissions the projects? What is the purpose of evaluation? Is it accountability or to get back or to get out results?



- Other points brought out in the discussion were: timing of evaluation with respect to collection of evidence; role of meta evaluation in taking care of seemingly irrelevant evidence but which can prove to be useful for long-term learning during the overall process of evaluation.

Both the groups agreed that external agencies/actors do not thoroughly understand the internal mechanisms and dynamics that affect a certain project as compared to the local stakeholders. Participants in this session did seem to delve into figuring out as to what is special to climate change evaluation from a regular evaluation.

The group split into three groups, each trying to address a specific question around how to bring a positive difference to the evaluation process.

The three ideas/questions that were put forward for groups to build upon where:

Group 1:

Evaluation can be viewed as a continuous process of informing strategic thinking rather than a procedure of accountability. Will a theory-based approach in evaluations enable learning from evaluations?

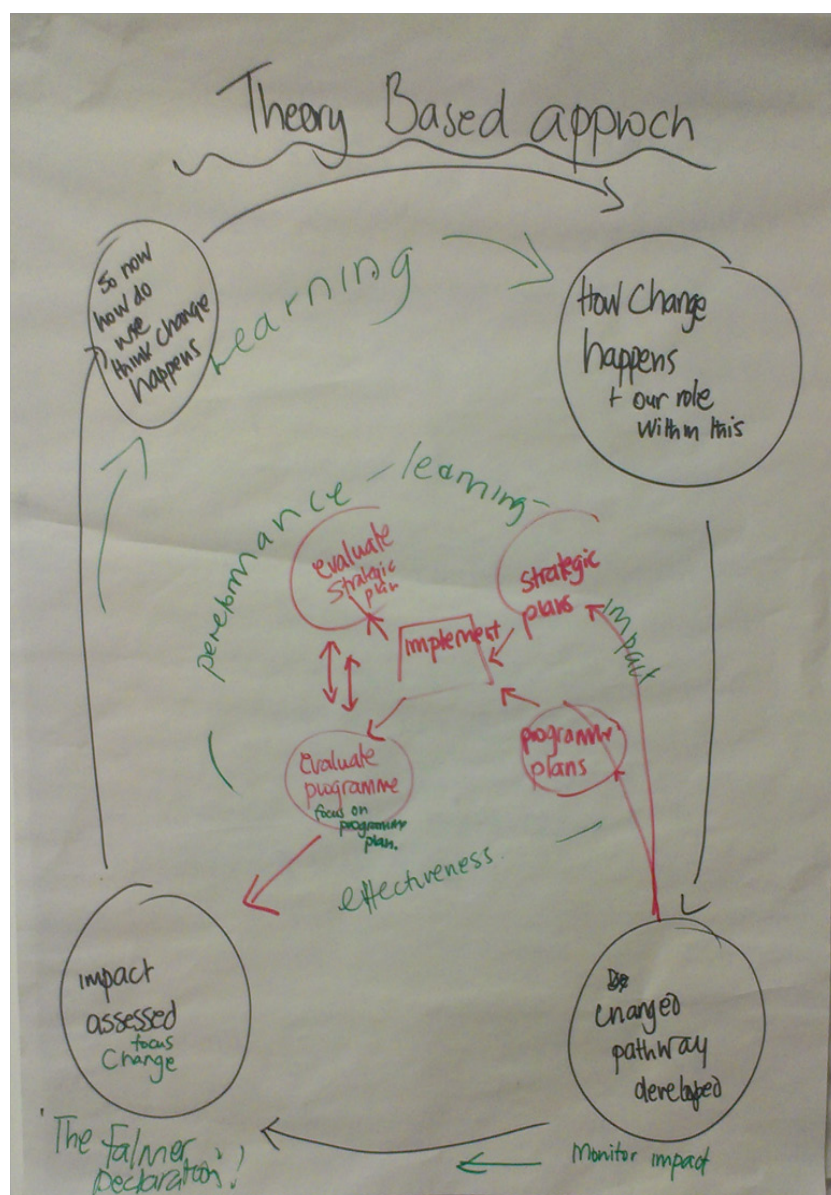
Group 2:

In face of climate change and evaluation where both depend on political acceptance, is there enough attention given to linking with policy makers and informing change? What can be the ways to strengthen evaluation? What has been learnt since Michael Bamberger's contribution to the 'Bridging the gap' publication on evidence-based policy making?

Group 3:

How can we do better at communicating lessons from evaluations?

Group I



- The group tried to understand where was the evaluation process situated in the theory of change approach to a project/programme.
- They began by focusing on how change happens and what is the position of evaluation in influencing a change.
- Once one has established the possible areas where a change can be brought about, a change pathway is conceived.
- As an external actor, then, this change is monitored to understand what aspect of the process has changed, to what extent and who has been affected by this change and importantly, if the change is relevant to the project/programme?
- This then goes back to understand as to how change happens. This is the overall iterative loop of actions.
- Also, after realizing the change pathway, a strategic plan and a programme plan can be made where the evaluation process can come into play.

Notes:

- evaluations are linked to different stakeholder incentives
- we know that ^{some} projects that are deemed successful by evaluations can have negative impacts
- The evaluation process should be designed @ the planning stage of programmes
- So what is the role of the evaluator?
 - Can we push back on ToR?
 - Question Theory of Change?
- We believe that a theory based approach to evaluation does make it sharper.

- The evaluation can be tested on its effectiveness, performance and impact based on its log frame, while it must be compatible with the change that is being targeted at all times.
- In the notes, the group considered the cases where evaluated success/failure of a project/programme could have negative/positive impacts. Thus, the evaluation process cannot sit as alone in the system but has to see relevance with what change is being brought about.
- Evaluation must be included in the design of the programme to help increase learning.
- What is the role of evaluators in this process? Can they push back on the terms of reference or question the theory of change? The group argues that there needs to be a new approach to evaluation as it encompasses learning. Also, evaluators need to be sensitive to differences in information requirements of different stakeholders.

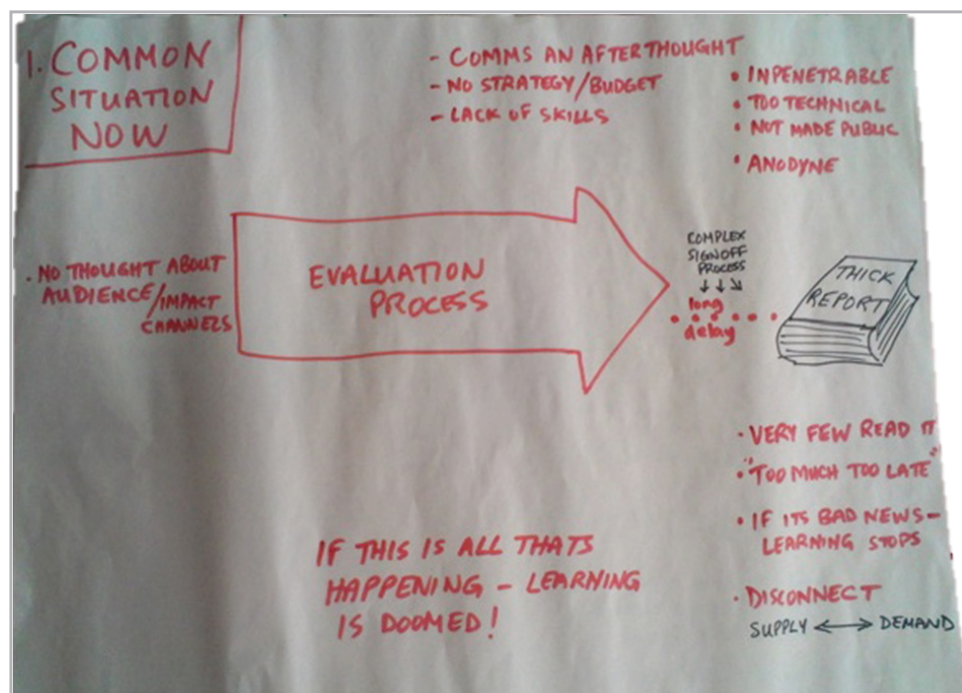
Group II

- Evaluation results could influence policy development and vice versa.
- Questions need to be answered by policymakers.
- Different stakeholders require different sort of information
- The different stakeholders recognized by the group were: civil society organizations, people, beneficiaries, private organizations, donors, implementing partners, monitoring and evaluation specialists, government and policy makers.
- Between the questions that need to be answered by policymakers and different information that is required by different stakeholders, there is a role that lobbying must play.
- The whole process must be institutionalized to develop ownership. But it also must help learning to build up as a culture. This process will be facilitated through a national evaluation policy. Stakeholders can help build learning culture by experimentation and risk-taking.
- The stakeholders are informed by communications strategy and vice versa. Communications strategy works on national/ sub-national/ local levels.



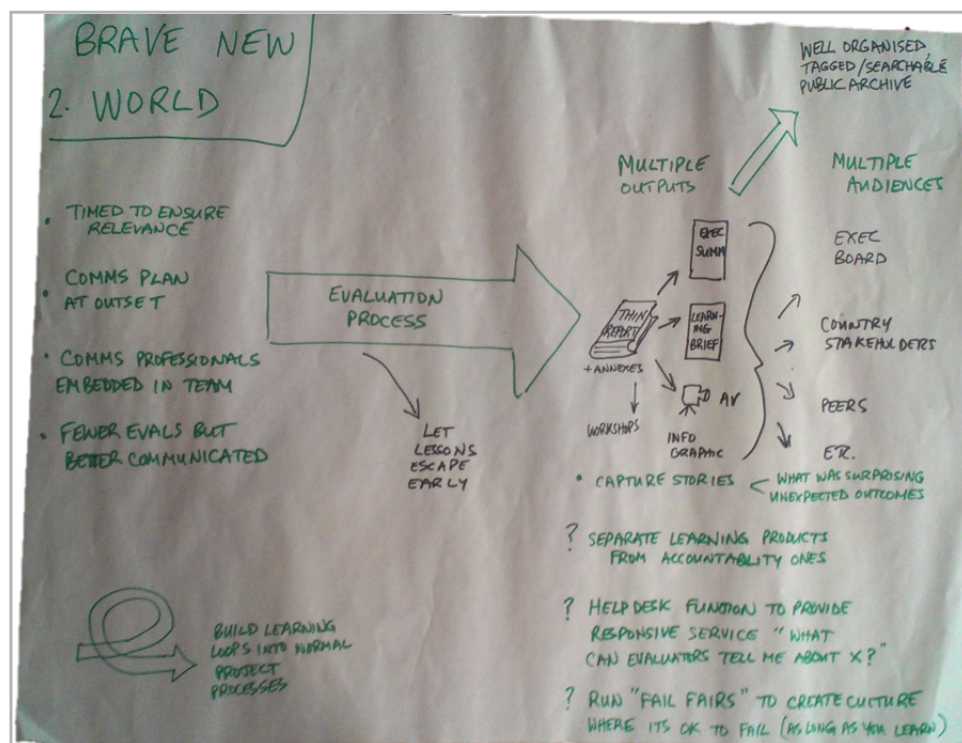
- For this process to then feed back into evaluation results, the group figured that there was a need for participatory evaluation to be done at a local level involving the people and the beneficiaries.
- The group pointed out that accountability was perceived differently in USA/Europe than in Asia. Accountability in the former focused more on the people whereas it focused more on donors and governments in the latter.

Group III



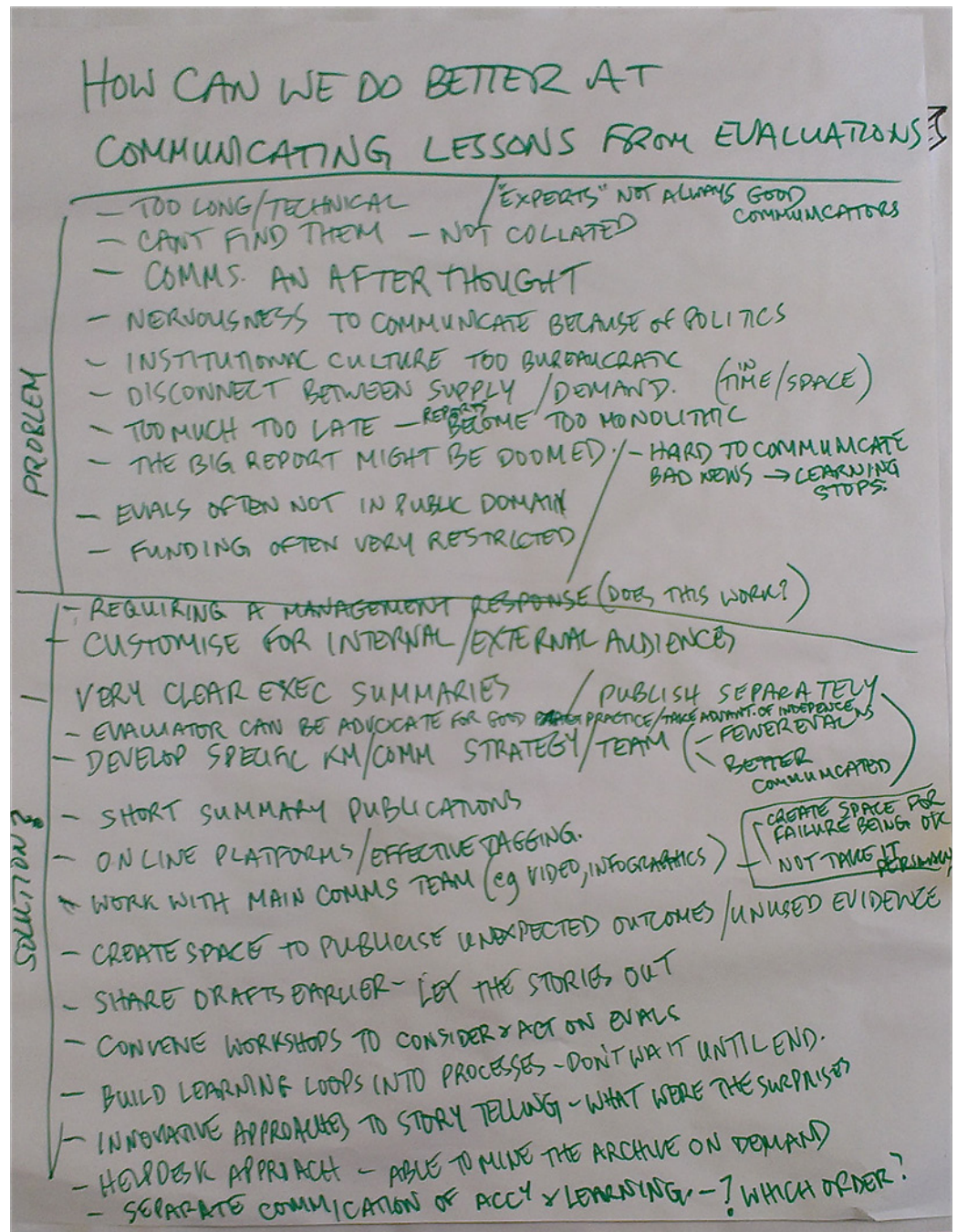
- The initial point put forward by the group was that producing a thick evaluation report was the most typical end to an evaluation process and as standalone was a wasteful practice.

- Communication strategies need to be developed for evaluation processes. The idea of 'fewer evaluations but communicating better' was pronounced. The communication cell is usually most under-resourced in evaluation teams and there is a need for more communication professionals.



- Creative communication methods need to be used (videos, info graphics, interviews) for making it more approachable.

- There is an issue with evaluation processes being overly protective of the information flowing throughout the process, since the information is often political. The information that is finally released in the end after repeated review processes is then often anecdotal. There should be some way to share the contentious learning material early in the process.



- Also, the communication each at the accountability side and at the learning side should be dealt with separately as the information shared in the former is bound to be political while information sharing in the latter serves the purpose of learning.
- Organizations must allow space for learning from failures.
- The group opined that there seems to be a need for demand-led helpdesk function for programme developers to have access to a database of existing evaluations.

The purpose of this short session was to collect reflections, comments or questions from the participants of the programme on cross-themes. Participants made the following comments based on what emerged from the discussions and exercises on the first day.

- It is important to establish boundaries of intervention, for any organization, failing to which can then lead to a loss of identity for the organization. The issues around interaction and coordination at micro level were often brought up in this meeting but those at macro level (for example, NAMAs and NAPAs) were less talked about. There is a great requirement for innovation.
- The discussions so far did not talk about how to operationalize new partnership models. It did not bring up the involvement of private sector and the opportunities that climate change does create. Importance of traditional knowledge did not come up in the 'learning and evaluation' theme.
- How do we get down what we are discussing on this platform?
- Indigenous knowledge and policymaking have a complex relationship. It can be difficult for policymakers to win trust and convince communities on something that might be different from their traditional knowledge. Likewise, it can be tricky for policymakers to accept and incorporate the traditional information. This situation calls for building standards.
- Collective learning is the key. Learning is incremental, involves reflection and learning

Mind-maps or cloud diagrams from Day 1 were discussed in detail with all the workshop participants. Some questions emerged for the 'Theory-based approach' model and 'Evaluation results' diagram.

Theory-Based Approach

- How is mapping process different from this?
- Does this approach work for single interventions or for multiple?

(Response: It depends in which area change is targeted at)

- Why is review process missing from this model?

(Response: There are a lot of things missing from this model and also that it is working in a 'perfect world')

- What difference does climate change bring about to this model?

Evaluation results

- Does this approach really work in the climate change scenario?

- How does this model behave in the real world (limited budgets, politics, conflicts, limitation between demand and supply)?

- How do you take care of conflicting reports that reach policymakers?

(Response: The process has marked 'Lobbying' to take care of such issues)

- What more scientific evidential information on climate change does this model require at process level?