

What We Know About Joint Evaluations of Humanitarian Action

Learning from NGO Experiences

Section 1 of 3: THE GUIDE

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ABOUT THIS BOOKLET	4
THE GUIDE.....	5
CHAPTER 1: WHY DO A JOINT EVALUATION?	5
The Benefits of a Joint Evaluation	5
The Downsides of a Joint Evaluation	6
Conclusion	7
CHAPTER 2: JOINT EVALUATION – WHEN, WHO AND HOW?	8
When will it take place?	8
Who will take part in it?	8
Is there enough time for a joint evaluation?	8
How will it be paid for?	9
How can the joint evaluation be most useful to various stakeholders?	9
CHAPTER 3: WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE EVALUATION	10
Choose a lead agency and agree on roles	10
Set up a management structure.....	10
Estimate costs and duration	11
Communicate what the evaluation is about.....	12
Find a competent administrator/manager	12
Carefully pick evaluation team members.....	12
Choose a few objectives to cover	14
Agree on evaluation standards and methods	14
Write an inception report.....	15
Manage communications within the collaboration	15
Prepare, prepare, prepare!.....	15
CHAPTER 4: WHAT TO DO DURING THE EVALUATION	16
Brief the team upon arrival	16
Share findings as you go.....	16
Ensure findings are reported with sensitivity	16
Finalizing the Evaluation Report.....	17
CHAPTER 5: WHAT TO DO AFTER THE EVALUATION.....	18
Develop both collective and individual rollout plans	18
Emphasize peer accountability	18
CHAPTER 6: JOINT EVALUATIONS IN REAL TIME	19
Prepare for the evaluation before the emergency starts.....	19
Take a “good enough” approach to the evaluation.....	19
Call on additional resources	19
Consider some other joint reflection process.....	20
References and Further Reading.....	21

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet was written to share knowledge gained from the experiences of people that have been involved in joint evaluations conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It mainly profiles the work of NGOs involved in the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), which has a goal to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness with which the humanitarian community saves lives, improves the welfare, and protects the rights of women, men and children affected by emergencies.

This booklet also draws on the lessons of multi-agency evaluations that already exist within the humanitarian sector. Major contributions have come, in particular, from the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

We hope that learning from previous experiences captured here will be useful for all those considering leading their agencies through a joint evaluation. The learning shared here is targeted at evaluation practitioners, managers, and NGOs contemplating a joint evaluation. Additionally, we hope that it will contribute to a growing body of knowledge on these processes and show that while there are many unanswered questions about joint evaluations, there is a lot we already know.

This booklet is comprised of three sections. The first section, **The Guide**, can be referred to as a 'how-to' for those closely involved in joint evaluations. It provides a framework for those approaching an interagency evaluation. The second section, **The Stories**, shares several case studies from the ECB Project's experiences. The third section, **The Tools**, includes many templates and tools that can be adapted for evaluations, including sample terms of references, agreement documents, and checklists.

THE GUIDE

CHAPTER 1: WHY DO A JOINT EVALUATION?

► Why should an agency consider taking part in a joint evaluation of an emergency response program?¹ After all, joint evaluations require collaboration, collaboration means more work and time, and time is a scarce commodity in emergency programs.

In recent years, several NGOs have sought to answer this question while taking part in the joint evaluations profiled in this book. While the results have been mixed and the learning curves have been steep, joint evaluations confer many benefits. While the evaluations themselves have yielded instructive and useful findings, agencies have also benefited significantly from the quality of the interactions that took place among peer agencies. Joint evaluations often serve as forums for ongoing learning, dialogue and even begin collaboration.

Agencies also inevitably learn that there are some pitfalls in the process of conducting joint evaluations. Though a joint evaluation is not so different from a single-agency evaluation, there are some major differences, some of which are highlighted below and addressed throughout this guide. Above all, like a single-agency evaluation, a joint evaluation provides an opportunity to learn from past action so as to improve future decision-making.

It should be noted that this guide sets out the ideal processes and structures for a joint evaluation. In an emergency setting, of course, constraints emerge that make the ideal process a challenge to achieve. Evaluators, therefore, must be flexible and willing to adapt to the realities on the ground in order to achieve some—if not all—of the objectives they set out to achieve.²

The Benefits of a Joint Evaluation

1. Seeing the Big Picture

One evaluator said, “You [may] think you’ve covered the world but you’ve only covered one village in ten.” Emergency responses typically involve several humanitarian actors. When the responses of more than one actor are put side-by-side and examined, the overall picture becomes clearer, revealing how factors such as geographic coverage, sector-specific interventions, and community involvement all fit together. Joint evaluations go further towards measuring impact by looking at the collective efforts of several actors to meet beneficiary needs and to identify what gaps exist.

2. Building Coordination and Collaboration to Improve Response

Given the scale of disasters and the disproportionate amount of suffering they cause, agencies working alone are generally not able to have a large impact. In fact, agencies that coordinate responses and work together during emergencies are better able to meet the needs of disaster affected populations. By comparing agencies’ responses side by side, joint evaluations are better able to point out areas where NGOs could have acted in a complementary fashion and make

¹ The model and definition of joint evaluations used in this booklet is any evaluation that looks at the work of more than one agency. This usually means that in addition to more actors being involved, there is a greater breadth of programming being examined.

² Readers looking for further guidance should review “Shoestring Evaluation: Designing Impact Evaluations Under Budget, Time, and Data Constraints” by Bamberger, Rugh, Church, and Fort.

recommendations for how they could do so in anticipation of the next emergency. Evaluation reports repeatedly show that better coordination would have led to a more effective response.

In some cases where agencies are already working together, a joint evaluation can be a ‘logical conclusion’ to a joint action or response. In Indonesia and in Niger in 2010, agencies agreed to conduct a joint evaluation to assess the impact of their joint activities.³

The process of collaborating on the evaluation itself can also be a powerful way of building relationships among partner agency staff that endure for the long term. In the ECB experience, some of these relationships have led to ongoing activities and even the formation of an NGO coordination forum (see *Niger*). In Haiti, the joint evaluation helped to build relationships among national staff and managers, serving as a starting point for longer term inter-agency collaboration.

3. Wielding Weightier Conclusions, Improving Peer Accountability and Transparency

Joint evaluations can be more authoritative because of the combined ‘weight’ of those backing them. As such evaluations are available to a wider audience, there is likely to be greater pressure to act upon the recommendations. Additionally, they provide a larger body of evidence for purposes of joint advocacy.

When agencies open up to one another by sharing weaknesses and strengths, they increase transparency and make it easier for them to hold one another accountable for acting upon the recommendations. Transparency is critical for agencies in humanitarian responses, and sharing the findings of evaluations across agencies helps to become more transparent. In fact, agency peers may pressure the agency act on recommendations from an evaluation.

4. Learning from and Relationship Building with Peers

Partners in a joint evaluation have a rare opportunity to learn about each other’s programming and operations, and may share technical knowledge through the evaluation process, but also through the ongoing relationships that are often established. One practitioner noted that working with staff from other agencies sometimes brings new perspectives or even changes her thinking about a particular issue.

The relationship building that occurs through a joint evaluation allows agency staff to identify other agencies’ strengths and capacities. The relationships, founded on trust, that are built through a joint evaluation, may result in agency cooperation in the future.

The Downsides of a Joint Evaluation

1. More Complexity

It takes time, skill and patience to get agencies to agree to do a joint evaluation, agree on a manageable list of objectives, diffuse any tensions that may arise, ensure that group decision-making processes are clear and respected, all while dealing with hiring and supervising an evaluation team, setting up interviews, ensuring logistics are in place, etc. This becomes even harder during an emergency.

³ See the 2010 Indonesia joint evaluation report for more information, available at www.ecbproject.org/resources

Without a lead agency to take on the primary responsibility for these tasks, and a committed steering committee that can jointly handle strategic decision-making, a joint evaluation can be frustrating and unsuccessful.

2. Less Depth

Often it is not feasible or relevant to go into much detail on any particular agency's programs as would happen in a single-agency evaluation. Therefore many of the evaluation questions of interest to each agency may not get answered.

3. More Expensive

Given the number of actions involved, joint evaluations can sometimes be more costly than single agency evaluations. If agencies agree to share the costs of the evaluation, however, additional costs per agency will be minimal.

Conclusion

Joint evaluations allow NGOs to learn from multiple perspectives and give them a more complete understanding of an emergency response. They help us work together now and in the future and lead to relationships that can be very productive. For these reasons they can be enriching experiences and have a profound impact on the way we do things as individual agencies and as collectives. It is important to have a realistic understanding of what can and cannot be accomplished by a joint evaluation before conducting one.

CHAPTER 2: JOINT EVALUATION – WHEN, WHO AND HOW?

► You may want to do a joint evaluation and have good reasons to do so. But first, make sure there will be enough time for the evaluation, willing partners, and human, financial and other resources to get it done. The following questions are meant to help you determine whether a joint evaluation is feasible.

When will it take place?

Evaluations can take place at different points of a response (during, immediately after, or several months after). The timing depends on what the agencies want to get out of the evaluation. Real-time evaluations during a response provide results that can improve the response going forward (see Chapter 6). Evaluations conducted near the end of an emergency, on the other hand, capture experiences and learning while it is still fresh. Evaluations conducted well after an emergency ends can still be useful and can capture longer-term impact of a response.

One important factor when creating a timeline for joint evaluations is to remember that working with multiple actors can slow you down. There is rarely a perfect time to conduct a joint evaluation, as all agencies are busy. Therefore, especially for real-time evaluations, it is important to start planning as early as possible during the emergency response.

Who will take part in it?

Approach other agencies that may already be considering an evaluation for the same humanitarian response. Consider agencies that have the same overall goal (e.g. ensuring affected populations are able to recover quickly from the disaster), and that have similar types of programs in geographic areas that are close enough together. Identify the appropriate person to contact, ideally someone who provides strategic direction for the country office. Explain what will be gained from doing this evaluation jointly (see Chapter 1). Listen to their views and note them down. Don't be discouraged if they are not interested. Keep talking to other agencies.

When talking to other agencies, find out how they approach evaluations. Do they conduct them because donors require them? How do they use the findings? What resources do they designate for evaluations? Take note of this to get a sense of how each agency will approach the evaluation and use the findings. Their answers will also help prepare you for potential areas of conflict, such as willingness to contribute staff time. See The Tools, *Suggested Topics for Discussion with Prospective Partners*. Be sure the agencies are willing to commit staff time and resources to support the evaluation.

For a joint effort, and because evaluations may reveal sensitive issues, it's also important to build trust among the agencies. To do so, agree on the focus of the evaluation together, rather than approaching others with your vision and asking if they are interested in joining in. Continue collaborating by communicating clearly, being transparent with information and intentions, and following through with commitments.

Is there enough time for a joint evaluation?

Be sure to allocate enough time for the evaluation team to get the job done. Unless the logistics of getting to and from field sites is unusually time-consuming, a thirty or forty day contract for the lead evaluator is reasonable. Ensure the evaluator has at least two days before officially starting the evaluation to do preparatory work such as to review documents, propose methodology, and plan logistics with the

agencies. Not ensuring enough time for the additional work will compromise the quality of the evaluation. Ensure that time is built in to account for missed deadlines, as may occur when many actors are involved.

How will it be paid for?

Joint evaluations usually take more time to conduct, and may require a relatively large team. Costs, therefore, may be higher than for single agency evaluations. The costs can be spread out among agencies, and this should be discussed as part of the earlier negotiation.

Have a rough idea of what the evaluation may cost. The main costs are for hiring consultants and support staff. Compare this with what funds may be available and what other agencies may be willing to contribute, including staff time, lodging, and vehicles. If insufficient funds are available for the evaluation, consider a joint peer review to review one another's programs and come together to discuss findings. Proper and realistic budgeting is critical.

Donors are likely to be receptive to joint evaluations if they bring about a better understanding of the context and the overall humanitarian response and some donors commission joint evaluations themselves. Therefore, if a budget funded by a given donor already accounts for an evaluation, the donor may be open to re-directing that activity from the single agency's evaluation to contribute to a joint evaluation.

How can the joint evaluation be most useful to various stakeholders?

Evaluations take a lot of resources and effort and everyone wants them to be useful. Joint evaluations can be useful to different stakeholders in different ways. In a large emergency, agency staff at regional and global levels will likely be interested in the findings. Talk to people at the head office level in the country where the emergency happened, at the regional level, and at headquarters level. Even if the findings refer to programs that have ended, can they be used to inform other programs, systems and policies within the organization?

If the proposal for the evaluation came from headquarters, do those in the field, particularly country office leadership, believe that this will be a useful exercise for them? If not, they may not want to engage, and the evaluation will prove hard to carry out. How will they use the findings? How committed will they be to the evaluation? Their interest and engagement need to be high to make this a successful experience.

There should be a reasonable level of confidence that the findings will be used before proceeding with the evaluation. If not, the evaluation team will struggle to achieve the objectives.

The idea for the ECB-supported Guatemala evaluation came from headquarters. The team in Guatemala felt that this was another HQ-driven initiative, so their participation in steering committee meetings was limited. The agencies on the ground tried to customize the objectives, but in retrospect felt they should have started from scratch. This negatively impacted the evaluation process and thus the usage of the findings.

In contrast, the idea for the ECB-supported joint evaluation in Jogjakarta also came from headquarters. However, the participating agencies on the ground took the lead on defining their objectives, with advice from headquarters. This helped ensure the partners were more in control of the evaluation process.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE EVALUATION

► If you have decided to pursue a joint evaluation, here are some things to consider.

Choose a lead agency and agree on roles

ECB has had the best results when one agency leads the joint evaluation process. Though some sharing of responsibility is desirable, agencies should designate the majority of the day-to-day management responsibilities to the lead agency. Any of the agencies being evaluated could serve as the lead; what matters is that the agency is capable of carrying out the responsibilities.

The lead agency hires and supervises the evaluation team, coordinates travel logistics, provides team members with workspaces, organizes meetings, and gives leadership regarding the definition of the objectives. Ultimately, it is this agency that is accountable for ensuring that the evaluation takes place.

A steering group made up of representatives from each agency can come together to agree on the roles of the lead agency, the roles assigned to other participating agencies, and share them with all involved persons, staff and evaluators. (For more, see section below on ‘Management Structure.’) ”

A lead agency that plays its role well can make a major difference in the process. The head evaluator in ECB’s Niger evaluation found the lead agency’s organization of the evaluation process and logistics to be the most helpful thing to him in carrying out his work. “It was one issue we didn’t have to think about; it was so well organized,” he noted.

Set up a management structure

When setting up a management structure for the evaluation it’s important to recognize that you are managing not just an evaluation but a collaboration. Don’t succumb to pressure to make choices favorable to the lead agency, steering committee members or high-level sponsors of the evaluation (e.g. “we must have x, y, and z represented, and any individuals will do”). Seek out individuals for the steering committee and evaluation team who are committed to a successful outcome, even if they are not conventional choices. Where there is a need for agency representation, create space for these individuals in some high profile, but less critical function.

A joint evaluation management structure could look something like this:

- **A steering committee.** This group will be responsible for strategic decision-making very early on regarding objectives, timing, and resource allocation, including staff and funding. The steering committee will also be active in reviewing and debating the findings and acting upon their implications within their agencies and beyond. It is normally chaired by the lead agency and has representation from each of the participating agencies. The committee would ideally be kept to a maximum of five, making oversight and decision-making more focused and achievable in reasonable amounts of time. This, however, supposes that agencies involved are willing to delegate staff to a committee.

The ideal steering committee member is senior enough to speak on behalf of his/her agency and has the authority to make decisions. This individual must have a good knowledge of his or her organization’s emergency programs and on-going development work. In addition, he or she should be able to think strategically, and know enough about evaluations to advise on the evaluation methods to be used and on the field locations to be covered. These individuals will also be those most likely to follow-up on relevant recommendations.

Steering committee members should agree on and document clear processes and standards of efficiency, transparency and accountability regarding roles and responsibilities. They should agree on how decision making would work, how to resolve disagreements within the steering committee, and how to share information. Steering committee members should be the same throughout the entirety of the evaluation. When members rotate on and off the committee, decisions and guidance may change, which will complicate matters for the evaluation team.

Other agreements concern the report format, the use of agency logos, the ownership of the products of the evaluation (i.e. intellectual copyright), how agencies will use the findings and if they will hold one another accountable, etc.

- **A chairperson.** This person is based at the lead agency for the evaluation and is a member and chair of the steering committee. He or she has most of the strategic decision-making, operational and collaboration responsibilities of the evaluation. This individual usually assumes the role of evaluation manager and is the direct reporting line for the team leader. The chairperson should manage the budget and track expenses.
- **A manager or administrator.** This person must ideally be based in the lead agency with a certain percentage of his or her time dedicated to the evaluation. See the following section for more details on the manager’s responsibilities. He or she could also sit on the steering committee but without voting rights.
- **The evaluation team.** The team is typically composed of one or two independent consultants, and a representative from each of the partner agencies. This team is accountable to the steering committee, particularly the committee chair.

There are variations on this structure, of course. Most evaluations also have higher-level sponsors that may also form a superstructure. Sector experts may also be needed on the evaluation team.



See The Tools for a *Sample Agreements Document*.

Estimate costs and duration

Based on the draft itinerary, the steering committee should agree on a draft budget and cost-sharing arrangements. Typically agencies share consultant costs equally and provide funding for the staff member they appoint to join the evaluation team. Think through funding implications for all aspects of the process and how long each activity will take. For example, ensure funds for good quality editing, formatting, and presentation, as these can make a significant difference in how widely the report is read. Be realistic about the time it will take the evaluation team to get the job done. At least 30 days or even forty days are recommended for the team leader. The consultant will likely be the largest cost, but it is essential to budget for, as his/her tasks will include:

- Review documents, prepare methodology, and correspond with the steering committee prior to the evaluation.
- Conduct field visits to at least three sites for each of the agencies.
- Interview agency staff.
- Interview other stakeholders.
- Present the findings to stakeholders in country.
- Prepare a draft of the report.
- Incorporate edits and comments on the report from multiple actors.

Communicate what the evaluation is about

A joint evaluation is a newsworthy event, but not everyone will understand its purpose. Make sure people inside and outside the participating agencies, including beneficiaries, are aware of the evaluation so that they will be more likely to review and make use of the findings. Draft a one-page informational sheet about the evaluation for widespread sharing, and especially with country office staff who need to be aware of the evaluation (though they would ideally be engaged throughout the process).

It is particularly important to have preparatory discussions with beneficiary communities to ensure they understand the purpose of the evaluation and they agree to participate in the evaluation. They should understand that evaluators do not have any assistance to give.⁴ In Haiti, the evaluation team trained 30 national staff from the participating agencies who spoke Haitian Creole to be responsible to engage beneficiaries. They did so by conducting focus group discussions, asking open-ended questions to understand people's experience with the emergency response.⁵

Find a competent administrator/manager

Consider hiring someone who can spend a significant amount of time (50-100%) focused on the evaluation, especially in the month or two leading up to it. This person may be an administrator, but should also be supervised by a senior person who can advise on strategic issues.

A superb administrator can make a major difference in the success of any evaluation but particularly a joint evaluation. Ideally, a national staff person should be hired or seconded from one of the agencies. He or she will be responsible for meeting the logistical and administrative needs of both the steering committee and the evaluation team.

A sample task list for this person could look like this:

- Organize the recruitment for the independent consultant(s).
- Draft and process contract with consultant(s).
- Arrange schedules and manage the calendar.
- Arrange logistical arrangements for traveling in the field.
- Coordinate information exchange between the agencies and the evaluation team, such as collecting the relevant background documents for the evaluation team.
- Arrange meetings both with the participating agencies and with outside actors.
- Help document who is responsible for what and share this with all parties.
- Agree on norms for per diem and other policies. Typically, each agency follows their own and the coordinating one hires the externals and uses their per diems.
- Meet with the evaluation team.

The steering committee or chairperson could appoint the evaluation administrator or manager. Ideally, the steering committee will define the authority level of the administrator, who he or she will report to, and what level of authority he or she will have to make decisions. It should be made clear the amount of time an administrator will provide to support the evaluation team.

Carefully pick evaluation team members

Select the right team. In addition to the technical skills they need to conduct the evaluation, team members will also have to be good at balancing the needs of multiple clients with sensitivity. While their roles should be made clear before the evaluation, experience has shown that they will need to be flexible

⁴ See Tool 9 in the *Good Enough Guide to Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies*

⁵ See the CARE-Save the Children joint evaluation report at www.ecbproject.org

once the evaluation begins. The team should not be too large that it is difficult to manage. Three to four team members is usually sufficient. A typical team may be composed of:

- **An independent consultant/team leader.** This person knows a lot about evaluation and also has strong management and leadership skills, the ability to stay calm under pressure and to be adaptive in the face of the unexpected. A joint evaluation team leader also needs the ability to deal with multiple layers of management and balance various expectations, and thus must have strong diplomacy and communication skills – both written and verbal. The team leader should also have had previous experience as a team leader, since this is itself a special skill. Team leaders with these skill sets are sometimes hard to find, and it is critical that there is a budget line to pay for them.

Though it's not always possible to recruit a team leader who has previously led joint evaluations, confirm that he or she has experience in impact analysis in emergencies, as he or she will need to understand how the various sets of data come together to form a bigger picture. Note that consultants often come with their own ideas and methodologies, and they will need guidance and parameters from the steering committee.

- **A national consultant.** The national consultant provides critical guidance on the political, social, and cultural context of the emergency to the team, especially to the team leader, who is often an expatriate. Having such a person on hand for a joint evaluation can help in networking with national stakeholders and ensure that knowledge is quickly transferred to the evaluation team about key actors and events and can minimize some of the complexity of the data and factors to be analyzed.
- **A sector specialist.** A joint evaluation will challenge the team of evaluators to address the wide range of program areas being covered while also focusing on selected key and priority aspects, especially as each agency may have unique interests. If agencies need more in-depth examination of a particular type of program, they should consider bringing a sector specialist to the team, freeing up other members to focus on the overall picture.
- **Agency team members.** Each agency typically appoints one representative to the evaluation team. These individuals are not acting on behalf of their agency but rather must be impartial evaluators. The skill sets of these people, for example their expertise in certain sectoral areas, language and facilitation skills, and evaluation experience are very important to the overall success of the team. Ensuring that agency—and even country office—staff are represented on the evaluation team will increase ownership of the evaluation findings.

It may be hard for agency team members to be available for the full length of the evaluation, but experience has shown that continuity is important to evaluation quality and the learning experience is also greatly enhanced. Agency managers should therefore make every effort to ensure full participation of agency staff on the evaluation team.

Given the importance of getting competent team members, it's important to start the recruitment process early. Good independent consultants—national and international alike—are often booked for weeks or even months in advance.

Once the steering committee has finalized the Terms of Reference for team members and the skills they want, agencies should consider requesting help from their head or regional offices in recruiting the team, such as doing the initial advertising and screening and then sending a shortlist of candidates to the lead agency.

By the time hiring begins, the objectives for the evaluation should have been well enough defined that the steering committee is clear on what profiles are needed on the team and thus, who to hire.



See The Tools for *Sample Terms of Reference for Evaluation Team Members*.

Choose a few objectives to cover

The participating agencies may have different interest areas they'd like to cover in a joint evaluation. But it is not practical to address too many objectives in a joint evaluation as there is already more content to cover. Ideally, there should be no more than three or four objectives within the terms of reference, and the scope should be as narrow as possible. For example:

- How well did the various agencies coordinate their responses?
- How appropriate was the intervention?
- How timely was the intervention?
- How well did the response assist people in recovering from the disaster?

Objectives that concern the overall impact of the response are usually best for a joint evaluation. Objectives of unique concern to one or two participating agencies, such as issues of operational efficiency, are not generally appropriate. In areas where more depth is needed, hire an additional team member to focus specifically on a particular type of programming or issue.

Do ask for input on the scope from staff at different levels of each agency whom you expect to use the evaluation findings. At the same time, it is wise not to consult too widely, as you will run the risk of adding too many objectives and an unrealistic scope for the evaluation.

Objectives should be agreed upon before the evaluation team is hired. In fact, consider bringing in an external facilitator to negotiate the scope of the evaluation ahead of time. Once the lead evaluator joins, he or she should have the chance to tell the participating agencies what is feasible and realistic. It is critical to find a balance between what agencies want and what the lead evaluator believes is possible.



See The Tools for a *Terms of Reference Template*.

Agree on evaluation standards and methods

Joint evaluations should include a document review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with staff and beneficiary groups.

The team leader will build an approach to examine each agency's work with enough rigor to inspire confidence in the findings, but not detract too much from a focus on the overall impact of the agencies' response. However, the steering committee is expected to advise this process and also communicate the criteria they will use for village and beneficiary selection for the interviews.

In addition to more locations for field visits, for joint evaluations, there may also need to be more interviews with other actors, such as UN agencies, representatives from civil society, national and local partners, and government officials.

Certain indicators will be non-negotiable to be in line with accepted international standards, such as the OECD/DAC standards for evaluation.⁶ Sphere standards are another key point of reference which should

⁶ <http://www.alnap.org/resources/guides/evaluation/ehadac.aspx>

be assessed during an evaluation, not only for technical sectors, but also core standards of participation. One set of standards should be used for consistency in measuring performance. Be clear on what organizational minimum standards are. Reference the [Key Elements of Accountability](#) on the ECB Project website.

Write an inception report

The evaluation team should develop an inception report on the terms of reference and with a workplan. This report, written by the team leader, will ensure expectations are agreed on by the steering committee and the team itself. It also allows for the evaluation team leader to dialogue with the steering committee about what is realistic and feasible, given availability of staff, budget, and deadlines.

Manage communications within the collaboration

Agencies conducting a joint evaluation need clear agreements around communication. Face-to-face meetings are critical to make sure understandings are clear and to build cohesion. Deciding how to store key documents is also very important. One solution is to set up a simple web page to upload documents, contact lists, schedules and other essential information.

It is also important to have regular opportunities along the way for the evaluation team to discuss any concerns with steering committee members. For example, early in the process, the team can give feedback as to how well the evaluation methods are working and check with the steering committee whether these should be modified. If the steering committee is engaged, the evaluation will be much more likely to succeed.

It is also important to agree in advance on principles of transparency with evaluation results, including communicating results in a transparent way to beneficiary communities (which could be in the form of a discussion or roundtable). Trying to cover up or hide evaluation results is not only against principles of accountability, but undermines organizational learning and can often backfire.

Prepare, prepare, prepare!

Our experience has shown that a good amount of work can be undertaken even before the evaluation team arrives. Once the Terms of Reference for the evaluation has been established, a list of key informant interviews can be determined, meetings established, focal points ready, and preparatory documents can be emailed to the evaluator.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT TO DO DURING THE EVALUATION

► If realistic objectives, management structure, and a competent team have been chosen and established, the evaluation should be easier to manage. The team will still need good logistical support and guidance. Here is some additional guidance on conducting the evaluation.

Brief the team upon arrival

Ensure that the team has a chance to discuss the Terms of Reference with each of the steering committee members. The lead evaluator should also go over the Terms of Reference with the steering committee as a group.

The administrator/manager or steering committee chair can brief team members on roles and responsibilities within the evaluation structure. The team will need to be briefed not only on the logistics and the process of the evaluation, but also on the response programs which are to be evaluated. The team will need to be clear on how the evaluation is run, the role of the lead agency and the other agencies, to whom the team reports, where they will get logistical support, and how they will maintain independence. When these are not clear, confusion abounds, and the team will struggle to achieve objectives. Anticipate the extra consultation time needed when estimating how much time the team will need for the evaluation.

Share findings as you go

The team leaders should also ensure that the steering committee and the stakeholders (as mentioned below) receive regular updates throughout the process. If the steering committee and stakeholders are well briefed about the progress and initial findings of the evaluation, there will be no surprises at the end. Daily debriefs among the evaluation team draws out preliminary findings which the team leader can use to provide regular updates.

Ensure findings are reported with sensitivity

Receiving and reviewing the findings of a joint evaluation can be an exciting time for the agencies but also a time of apprehension. The lead evaluator should present findings in a way that will not make any agency feel inferior or unfairly compared with others. Agencies will also inevitably look for mentions of themselves and judge whether they think the findings are fair. Findings that are critical in nature should be phrased in a constructive way, supported by reasonable evidence and balanced with positive feedback. In addition to the main report, the evaluator could also create short individual reports for each of the agencies. In practice, however, this may not be worth the additional effort since joint evaluations tend to be better at looking at the overall response and coordination between agencies (i.e. from a beneficiary perspective) than looking at individual agency operations in detail.

Another approach is for the evaluation team to do a preliminary analysis that compiles and groups findings. Through a workshop or meeting, the team can facilitate staff from the participating agencies (especially those who will use the findings) to collectively draw conclusions and recommendations. With this type of participation, agencies are more likely to accept the conclusions and feel responsible for acting on the recommendations.

Ultimately, when joint evaluations are well planned and agencies and the team communicate throughout the process, agencies are less likely to take issue with the results. A focus on learning makes even the least flattering findings more palatable because they can be instructive.

Once the agencies have had a chance to discuss and debate the findings, they should discuss them with a broader group of stakeholders, especially those that were consulted during the evaluation process, such as UN agencies, beneficiaries, local NGOs, and local government. One way to do this is to hold an inter-agency validation workshop where stakeholders are given an opportunity to confirm or dispute the major findings and recommendations.

Finalizing the Evaluation Report

The evaluation report should be easy to read and relatively short—no more than 30 pages. It is important to focus on that which has gone well, and good practice should be highlighted in the report.

Assuming stakeholders have been briefed throughout the evaluation, the findings and recommendations in the evaluation should not come as a surprise. Do anticipate, however, that stakeholders will not agree with all findings and the steering committee should be prepared to address this.

It is critical to set out a period to receive feedback on the draft of the report. Be clear and realistic about the timeline for this period. It needs to be long enough to allow the right people to provide feedback, but not so long that the findings are no longer relevant by the time the report is completed. After ensuring that all of the people who need to give feedback are informed of the schedule in advance, two to four weeks is a reasonable time in which to allow people to submit feedback.

The evaluation team leader is ultimately responsible to make the decisions about which feedback is incorporated and which is not. If there is enough disagreement about certain findings or conclusions, these can be addressed in a management response that is annexed to the final report.

CHAPTER 5: WHAT TO DO AFTER THE EVALUATION

► With the evaluation work done and the findings detailed, one part of the process comes to a close. But in other ways, the real work is just beginning. Here is some guidance for making the most of the completed evaluation.

Develop both collective and individual rollout plans

Because joint evaluations have relevance to a wide range of actors, agencies should share the report with humanitarian bodies and such networks as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), in addition to headquarters. Sharing the report from a joint evaluation report widely demonstrates transparency and a commitment to contribute to learning within the broader humanitarian sector.

The agencies may want to develop simple collective and individual communications plans including distribution lists for the report and small action planning meetings to discuss and present the implications of the findings.

Emphasize peer accountability

With joint evaluations, agencies have the opportunity to hold one another accountable for progress on recommendations. They may choose to work on some recommendations together. They may agree beforehand to hold a follow-up workshop in six months or a year's time. At such a time, they could then discuss how the findings were shared, what progress was made and what was the outcome of any actions taken.

CHAPTER 6: JOINT EVALUATIONS IN REAL TIME

► Conducted while the emergency response is still ongoing, real time evaluations (RTEs) are valuable tools for rectifying problems and making improvements in programmes. However, a joint RTE can be especially challenging. Here are some things to consider if facing the decision of conducting a joint evaluation in real time.

Prepare for the evaluation before the emergency starts

In cases of slow onset emergencies, there may be time to plan months in advance. Even with rapid onset emergencies, preparedness is possible. You can jointly outline generic plans for the evaluation which can be turned into actual plans in the face of a disaster. These plans should include as many of the aspects as possible that are outlined in this booklet on how to organise a joint evaluation, including, crucially, the designation of focal points. These focal points are on standby and will have the responsibility of getting an RTE process started, convening the various actors, etc. and who will ideally remain as point persons during the process.

Take a “good enough” approach to the evaluation

You may have to take some shortcuts and use a “good enough” approach. “Good enough” does not mean second best: it means in an emergency response, adopting quick and simple solutions may be the only practical possibility. When the situation changes, you should aim to review your chosen solution and amend your approach accordingly.

For example, you can simplify managerial structures. Within days of the parties agreeing to do a joint evaluation, you may agree to establish a small, rapidly organized managerial structure (which can subsequently transition to a more robust one at a later stage). During the first week, for instance, that group could look at what is minimally necessary, and create a practical “quick-and-dirty” terms of reference. The management committee could delegate much of the day-to-day management to one or two key actors, and thus spend less time on group decision-making and consensus building.

Each participating agency would be trusted to carry out the tasks assigned to them in accordance with pre-determined plans and standards. Once the process has been started and the evaluation is in motion, agencies can then gradually build in tighter quality control mechanisms, more focused terms of reference, and a more inclusive process (e.g. a larger management group).

Such a ‘good enough’ approach is not an ideal evaluative process, but likely relevant for RTEs because agencies are particularly busy with the implementation of a response. However, certain aspects of the joint evaluation should not be subjected to shortcuts. These include ethical standards, such as the confidentiality and independence of the evaluative process.

Call on additional resources

Participating agencies could consider calling on additional internal support. A staff member could be seconded to a country office for some weeks to help with the joint RTE. Unlike country office staff, who would presumably be preoccupied with the emergency response, this person would have time to focus on the evaluation. He or she could do an initial scoping, a stakeholder analysis and hold a meeting collectively or individually with partners to get their views. He or she could also assist with practical preparations for the team, including setting up field visits.

Consider some other joint reflection process

If a joint RTE is not realistic, consider other learning processes like a joint after action review or a peer review. Agencies can do quick assessments of their work (see [Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide](#)) and get together for a short meeting/workshop, or invite an experienced expert to provide advice on how the operation may be adapted.

References and Further Reading

Joint Evaluations

Guidance for Managing Joint Evaluations. DAC Evaluation Series, OECD 2006.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/28/37512030.pdf>

Joint Evaluations: Recent Experiences, Lessons Learned, and Options for the Future. DAC Evaluation Network Working Paper, OECD, 2005.

Lessons About Multi-Agency Evaluations: Asian Tsunami Evaluation Coalition. http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org/NR/rdonlyres/9DBB5423-E2EF-43AB-B6D2-2F5237342949/0/tec_lessonslearned_ver2_march06_final.pdf

General Evaluations

USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS series.

<http://evalweb.usaid.gov/resources/tipsseries.cfm>

Western Michigan University, Evaluation Center. Evaluation Checklists

<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/checklistmenu.htm#models>

Shoestring Evaluation: Designing Impact Evaluations Under Budget, Time, and Data Constraints. M. Bamberger, J. Rugh, M. Church, and L. Fort, *The American Journal of Evaluation*, 2004.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist. Michael Quinn Patton

<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/ufe.pdf>