Reframing the evidence debates: a view from the media for development sector

Description

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Abraham-Dowsing, Kavita, Anna Godfrey, and Zoe Khor. 2014. â??Reframing the Evidence Debates: A View from the Media for Development Sectorâ?•. BBC Media Action. Available as pdf. This is part of BBC Media Actionâ??s Bridging Theory and Practice series. An accompanying appendices document is available here. It includes priority research questions, and more detail on the evidence examples cited in the paper. The report was prepared with funding from the UK Department for International Development.

Introduction : â??Donors, policy-makers and practitioners need evidence to inform their policy and programming choices, resource allocation and spending decisions, yet producing and making use of high-quality research and evidence is not straightforward. This is particularly the case in sectors that do not have a long history of research or evaluation, that are operating in fragile states with low research capacity and that are trying to bring about complex change. The media for development sector (see Box 1) is one such example. Nonetheless, donors, governments and private foundations working in international development have long recognised the importance of independent media and information sources in their work and the role that communication can play in bringing about change. Despite this recognition, however, in debates around evidence on the role of media and communication in achieving development communication in achieving development outcomes, assertions of â??no evidenceâ?• or â??not enough evidenceâ?• are commonplace. With the evidence agenda gaining more prominence in the development sector, there is a risk for any sector that finds it difficult to have a clear, concise and cohesive narrative around its evidence of impact.

This paper is based on a series of interviews with practitioners, evaluators and donors working in the media for development sector, and looks at their understanding of what counts as evidence and their views on the existing evidence base. It argues that compelling evidence of impact does exist and is being used â?? although this varies by thematic area. For example, it highlights that evidence in the area of health communication is stronger and more integrated into practice compared with other thematic areas such as media and governance or humanitarian response outcomes. The paper also contends that, alongside evidencing development outcomes (for example, mediaâ??s impact on knowledge, attitudes, efficacy, norms and behaviours), more evidence is needed to answer specific questions about how, why and in what ways media and communication affect people and societies â?? and how this varies by local context.

The paper argues that the lack of clear evidential standards for reporting evidence from media for development programmes, the limited efforts to date to collate and systematically review the evidence that does exist, and the lack of relevant fora in which to critique and understand evaluation findings, are significant barriers to evidence generation. The paper calls for an â??evidence agendaâ?•, which creates shared evidential standards to systematically map the existing evidence, establishes fora to discuss and share existing evidence, and uses strategic, longer-term collaborative investment in evaluation to highlight where evidence gaps need to be filled in order to build the evidence base. Without such an agenda, as a field, we risk evidence

producers, assessors and funders talking at cross purposes. â?•

As the paperâ??s conclusion states, we actively welcome conversations with you and we expect that these will affect and change the focus of the evidence agenda. We also expect to be challenged! What we have tried to do here is articulate a clear starting point, highlighting the risk of not taking this conversation forward. **We actively welcome your feedback during our consultation on the paper which runs from August until the end of October 2014, and invite you to share the paper and appendices widely with any colleagues and networks who you think appropriate.**

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Category

1. Uncategorized

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