# Learning how to learn: eight lessons for impact evaluations that make a difference

## Description

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ODI Background Notes, April 2011. Authors: **Ben Ramalingam**

â??This Background Note outlines key lessons on impact evaluations, utilisation-focused evaluations and evidence-based policy. While methodological pluralism is seen as the key to effective impact evaluation in development, the emphasis here is not methods per se. Instead, the focus is on the range of factors and issues that need to be considered for impact evaluations to be used in policy and practice â?? regardless of the method employed. This Note synthesises research by ODI, ALNAP, 3ie and others to outline eight key lessons for consideration by all of those with an interest in impact evaluation and aid effectivenessâ?•. 8 pages

**The 8 lessons**:
Lesson 1: Understand the key stakeholders
Lesson 2: Adapt the incentives
Lesson 3: Invest in capacities and skills
Lesson 4: Define impact in ways that relate to the specific context
Lesson 5: Develop the right blend of methodologies
Lesson 6: Involve those who matter in the decisions that matter
Lesson 7: Communicate effectively
Lesson 8: Be persistent and lexible

See also Benâ??s Thursday, April 14, 2011 blog posting: When will we learn how to learn?

[**RD comments on this paper**]

1. The case for equal respect for different methodologies can be overstated. I feel this is the case when Ben argues that â??*First, it has been shown that the knowledge that results from any type of particular impact evaluation methodology is no more rigorous or widely applicable than the results from any other kind of methodology*.â?• While it is important that evaluation results affect subsequent policy and practice their adoption and use is not the only outcome measure for evaluations. We *also* want those evaluation results have some reliability and validity, that will stand the test of time and be generalisable to other settings with some confidence. An evaluation could affect policy and practice without necessarily being good quality , defined in terms of reliability and valdity.

- Nevertheless, I like Benâ??s caution about focusing too much on evaluations as outputs and the need to focus more on outcomes, the use and uptake of evaluations.

2. The section of Benâ??s paper that most attracted my interest was the story about the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, and how the evaluation team managed to ensure it became â??one of the most influential evaluations in the aid sectorâ?•. We need more case studies of these kinds of events and then a systematic review of those case studies.

3. When I read statements various like this: â??*As well as a supply of credible evidence, effort needs to be made to understand the demand for evidence*â?• I have an image in my mind of evaluators as humble supplicants, at the doorsteps of the high and mighty. Isnâ??t it about time that evaluators turned around and started demanding that policy makers disclose the evidence base of their *existing* policies? As I am sure has been said by others before, when you look around there does not seem to be much evidence of evidence based policy making. Norms and expectations need to be built up, and then there may be more interest in what evaluations have to say. A more assertive and questioning posture is needed.

**Category**

1. Uncategorized

**Tags**

1. evidence
2. impact evaluations
3. Learning
4. ODI
5. policy

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