

Starting  
shortly

Please  
wait!

# ActivityInfo

Quality and use of evidence  
For M&E professionals and Program Managers

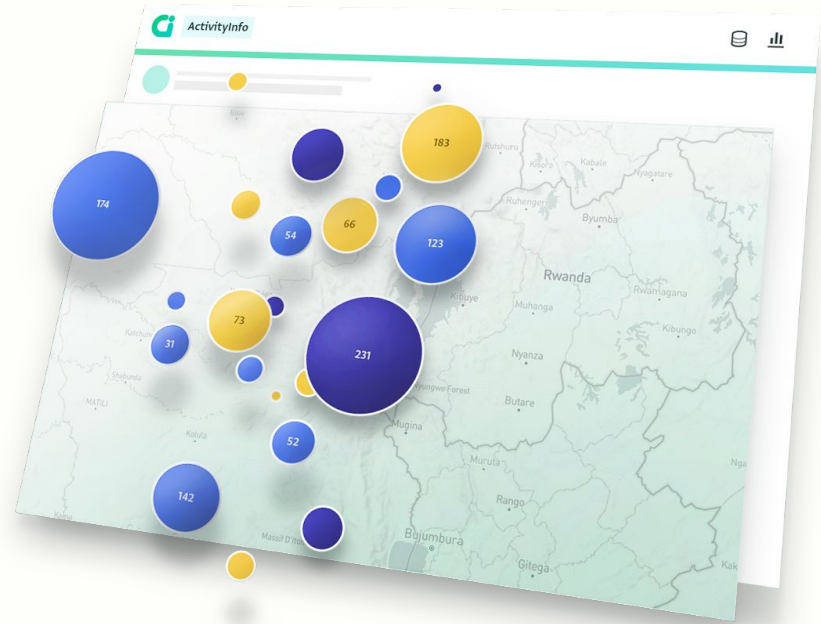


ActivityInfo

# Presented by the ActivityInfo Team

## Software for Monitoring & Evaluation

- Track activities, outcomes
- Beneficiary management
- Surveys
- Work offline / online



# Evidence based decision making



## Incentive for this webinar series:

- *The fundamental key is to raise awareness upon evidence and the quality of evidence and be conscious in which case humanitarian and development actors are ready to accept lower quality and how this may affect the use of evidence.*
- *There exist significant improvements towards evidence based decision making, but there is room for improvement.*

# Presentation outline

## Overview

- What is evidence?
- Why does evidence matter?
- Why does the quality of evidence matter and how to determine the quality?
- Why can producing high quality evidence be challenging?
- Is evidence being used guide decision making?
- How can quality and use of evidence be improved?
- Time for QandA

# What is Evidence

# What is evidence?

Knowledge

A belief that is grounded in some form of 'fact'

Data

Raw, unorganized facts

Information

Data that has been processed to show patterns and give meaning

Evidence

Information that relates to a specific proposition, and which can be used to support or challenge that proposition

# What is evidence?

## Example of evidence:

- Evidence based on information from Quantitative data (primary or secondary)
- Evidence based on information from Qualitative data ( primary or secondary)

## Arising from:

- assessments
- monitoring systems
- evaluation

## Case study: Addressing intimate partner violence, food security and nutrition in Ecuador

### Context

In Ecuador, violence and discrimination against women remains high across socio-economic groups. The lifetime prevalence of IPV is estimated at 35% for physical violence, 14.5% for sexual violence and 43.4% for psychological violence.

### Intervention

In 2011, WFP expanded its assistance to the Ecuador government to support the integration of Colombian refugees and address the food security and nutrition needs of refugees and poor Ecuadorians. The programme consisted of six monthly transfers of cash, vouchers or food to Colombian refugees and poor Ecuadorian households.

**The evaluation found that** transfers reduced controlling behaviour amongst men and physical or sexual violence. The findings suggested that reductions in IPV are due to a combination of improvement in women's bargaining power and a decrease in poverty-related conflict. Food vouchers were shown to be a cost-effective modality to deliver food assistance and improve dietary diversity. ***Findings informed the design of Food and Nutrition Security in Ecuador and WFP's country strategy plan.***

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2019. Addressing intimate partner violence, food security and nutrition in Ecuador (online summary), Evidence Impact Summaries. New Delhi:3ie.

# What is evidence?

## Key messages

- The meaning of evidence has been challenged during the 20th century.
  - acknowledgment that exists complex pathways through which research, knowledge or evidence may (or may not) be taken up by policymakers and practitioners
  - challenge the “linear” cause effect model
  - challenge the idea of strict objectivity: absolute truth separate from the observer
  - emphasis on people’s experiences and perceptions
- Evidence is information that relates to a specific proposition, and which can be used to support or challenge that proposition

The **nature** of humanitarian and development sector action means that we are often dealing with **subjective ‘realities’**, and as a result should be open to considering **many different types of information as evidence**.

**The key** to approach with “**objectivity**” the “**subjective realities**” is to become participatory and challenge our biases



Why evidence matters?

# Why evidence matters?

## Three key elements



Evidence is **essential** in promoting the critical reflection required to challenge the established narratives, biases and preconceptions and in turn to enable learning.

**Learning can be seen as the “vehicle”** that enables effectiveness, accountability and ethics to be exercised at full scale.

# Key Messages

## Why evidence matters?

- The failure to generate and use evidence in policy and response makes humanitarian action less effective, less ethical and less accountable.
- To ensure the quality of the response – for instance, gathering and using **timely** and **credible** evidence can enable responses to ensure effective coverage, meet priority needs and engage with existing capacities. In the longer term, evidence can inform learning for future programming and policy changes.
- Evidence of performance and results can feed into efforts to strengthen **accountability** to donors, partners and the target population.

Why does the quality of evidence matter  
and how to determine quality?

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Why does the quality matter?

The quality of evidence reflects the extent to which information that relates to a specific proposition can be trusted, and thus used to support or challenge that proposition

Differences in quality of evidence are not dependent on the nature of evidence (quantitative or qualitative)

Different research designs and methods are more or less appropriate for different contexts

***Challenging to identify criteria for the quality of variety types of information!!!***

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

information can only be accepted as evidence ***if the methods used to gather and analyze it***, and any ***limitations in the collection of evidence***, are made ***explicit***. (...) Whether it is early-warning, assessment, programme choice, implementation, monitoring, or evaluation, needs to be based on robust evidence rather than merely reflecting the prevailing narratives, biases or preconceptions

Knox-Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014) Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ Overseas Development Institute. <http://www.alnap.org/resource/10441>

Quality of evidence

Quality of analysis

***information counts as evidence only IF both the data, and the methods used to analyze this data, can be measured against specific quality criteria!***

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

**Different sets of criteria exist to judge the quality of evidence**

*Focus on the the six criteria which reflect the general consensus of the humanitarian practitioners and academics at the 28th ALNAP Annual Meeting*

Overview of the meeting, including all presentations and panel material and videos are available on the ALNAP website:  
[www.alnap.org/events/28th](http://www.alnap.org/events/28th)

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

01

### Accuracy

- Good reflection of a real situation
- Example: Anthropometric measurements that have been correctly conducted
- The importance of observer or information via unconscious bias, falsification, misunderstanding, incorrect use of tools



# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

02

### Representativeness

- Accurate illustration of the conditions of larger group of interest
- Example: information that may represent the view of a village but does not represent of the villages of the area of interest

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

03

### Relevance

- Does the information related to the proposition is challenged or confirmed?
- Example: anthropometric measures provide evidence for the nutritional status, but they may be less effective for food scarcity
- Every information should be checked against relevance!

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

04

Generalisability of  
conclusions

- Can we generalize the information beyond a specific situation? (external validity)
- Concern for policy making
- Implications for global indicators and thresholds?

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

05

Attribution of analysis

- Clear association between cause and effect
- Core criterion for evaluations

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Quality Criteria

06

Clarity around contexts and methods

- Is it clear how, about whom and why evidence was collected?
- Without context information, it is impossible to determine whether evidence is relevant or can be generalized
- This is the basis to determine quality of evidence

# Why does the quality matter and how to determine quality?

## Key messages

- The quality of evidence reflects the extent to which information that relates to a specific proposition can be trusted, and thus used to support or challenge that proposition
- Before saying that information counts as evidence, both the data, and the methods used to analyze this data, should be measured against specific quality criteria.
- Six quality criteria presented based on ALNAP

*The threshold for use of evidence will depend on circumstances: in some circumstances we should be prepared to accept lower quality evidence, but we need to be aware of the reason why and their implications!*

Why is it challenging to produce  
evidence of high quality?

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

01

standard approaches and definitions

- Absence of standard approaches and definitions across countries and organizations can hinder **accuracy**
- Example: attempts to approach a global monitoring as a way to provide global perspective



# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

02

Choice of measurement methods

- Choice of methods can challenge **representatives and accuracy**
- Lack of use of academically recognized qualitative methods
- Example: qualitative data cannot be generalized, given sampling and quantitative data cannot describe efficiently concepts such as feeling of target population

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

03

### Availability of information

- Limited secondary data due to context
- Out of date information due the quickly evolving environment
- Limited possibility for data collection due to movement restrictions
- Limited time for data collection, especially in emergency contexts

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

04

### Existing power dynamics

- The conscious or unconscious bias on external “expert”
- Power dynamics between people leading the intervention and targeted population
- Data collection led by donor requirements
- Interventions in countries which have political implications

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

05

Specific to evaluation

- complex and identification of the chain between deliverable and impact, lack of capacity; an aversion to publicizing failure; as well as technical difficulties and ethics component in establishing baselines and control groups
- High costs

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Threats to quality

06

### Other considerations

- Financial trade off between data collection allocation and intervention budget allocation
- Use of technology: credibility of sources? access to technology? accuracy of information?

# Why is challenging to produce evidence of high quality?

## Key messages

- 'What works' is always a reflection of the context in which policies are constructed, their content and methods, and the needs, motives and perceptions of the people claiming the attribution. **Context matters!!**
- Challenges may refer to: choice of measurement methods, standard approaches and definitions, availability of information, existing power dynamics
- Our choice of questions, sources and methods not only reflect the system that we have, it also creates the system of the future.

Is evidence being used in  
decision-making?

# Is evidence being used in decision making?

*Quality of evidence DOES NOT guarantee  
use of evidence*

*‘Only a minority of evaluations are effective at introducing evident changes or improvements in performance’*

*(Sandison, P. (2006) ‘The utilisation of evaluations’ in ALNAP Review of humanitarian action 2005. London: ALNAP/ODI. [www.alnap.org/resource/5225.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/resource/5225.aspx)).*



# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Constraints

- Monitoring and evaluation activities are frequently conducted by the same Organizations which will use the results resulting in donor skepticisms
- The role of decision-maker and context
  - course of action desirable to the decision maker
  - predetermined course of action

# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Constraints

- Time plays a crucial role. Information has to be accessible when a decision is made.

# Is evidence being used in decision making

Time: Case Studies on the effects on using ActivityInfo on addressing the time constraint

## ***The use of ActivityInfo for the Rapid Response Mechanism in CAR by the REACH Initiative***

*One of the immediate results of using ActivityInfo was that access to crucial, centralized information, such as numbers, became quick and easy for all partners. This ensured transparency and satisfying levels of communication within the Clusters. Mrs Anne Leschallier de Lisle, Information Management Officer and GIS Officer in the RRM programme of the REACH Initiative in the Central African Republic, points out:*

*“We do updates on a weekly basis. Without ActivityInfo, the same updates would only be done monthly.”*

<https://www.activityinfo.org/about/casestudies/reach.html>

## ***Disaster Risk Management and the COVID-19 Response in Afghanistan by Aga Khan Agency for Habitat Afghanistan***

*The decision to use ActivityInfo came as a result of a very thorough reflection on how to create a solution to optimize and meet the expectations that the agency had for data management. Before ActivityInfo, the data collection processes were mostly paper-based and collecting data would take too much time. People would need to go to the field, collect data, come back, enter the data, clean and process it.*

*“The shift from paper-based data collection to using ActivityInfo was characterized as a paradigm shift within the agency”*

*Mr. Hojibekov, Chief Executive Officer in AKAHA.*

<https://www.activityinfo.org/about/casestudies/agakhanagencyforhabitat.html>

# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Constraints

- Communication between M&E practitioners and program managers: Does information collected correspond to the needs?

# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Constraints

- Unconscious bias:
  - Working under time pressure, decision-makers will tend to resort to 'short-cuts' – simple assumptions and generalizations, which make it easier to make sense of information
  - social knowledge: How can we challenge a social accepted notion?
  - The “devil you know” : How our past experiences affect us?

# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Examples of evidence use: Cash-based programs

### Increase of Cash-based programs: Which was the role of evidence?

#### Before 2000

Scattered experiences from cash-based programming. Absence of coherent evidence

#### 2000

experiences were reviewed methodically in a single document: Buying Power: the use of cash transfers in emergencies (Peppiatt et al., 2000)

#### 2005 - 2007

Work from the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI, which published a series of papers considering the utility of cash in emergency contexts.

#### 2009

ALNAP's assessment was that 'research and evaluation played an important role' in the acceptance of cash programming (Ramalingam et al., 2009a: 63).

Peppiatt et al. (2000) Buying Power: The Use of Cash Transfers in Emergencies. London: The British Red Cross. [www.alnap.org/resource/10019.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/resource/10019.aspx)  
Ramalingam et al. (2009a) 'Innovations in international humanitarian action' in ALNAP Review of humanitarian action in 2009. London: ALNAP/ODI. [www.alnap.org/resource/5664.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/resource/5664.aspx)

# Is evidence being used in decision making

## Examples of evidence use: Consideration of cultural norms

### Crisis in Rwanda in 1994: Evidence was not actively used for more than 10 years

#### Before 1996

very limited understanding of the structure of Rwandese society and very little account had been taken of the views of beneficiaries....leading in series of mistakes that decreased the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the response

Borton et al. (1996a) 'The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects'. London: ODI.

#### 1997 - 2006

Findings were echoed in academic research that pointed to the importance of understanding the local context

#### 2006

The report of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition still reported ... displacement of able local staff by poorly prepared internationals; ... applying more demanding conditions to local 'partners' than those accepted by international organisations;... and poor-quality beneficiary participation'

Telford, J. and J. Cosgrave (2006) 'Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami: Synthesis report'. ALNAP and TEC/ODI.

#### 2012

local NGOs and civil society organisations are often marginalised in relief operations ; and international staff turnover remains high, preventing decision-makers from obtaining any in-depth knowledge of the (..) context in which they are working (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011;).

Bhattacharjee, A. and Lossio, R. (2011) 'Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake Final Report'. New York: UN OCHA.

# Is evidence being used in decision making?

## Key messages

- Mitigation of threats to quality does not guarantee the use of evidence.
- For evidence to influence decision-making, the information has to be accessible when the decision is being made!!!



How can quality and evidence can be improved?

# How can quality and use of evidence can be improved?

## Five guiding principles

- Using more robust methodologies for analysis and collection: using tried and tested approaches from the social sciences for qualitative work, and continuing to explore the possibilities for quantitative and mixed methods approaches.
- Proportionate investment: ensuring that investments in evidence match the importance of the questions addressed.
- Increased collaboration: key stakeholders should work together to identify key questions; decreasing unnecessary duplication and sharing and challenging results. This applies both internally in an organization and externally
- Thinking of the longer term: collecting consistent data and tracing trajectories sets over time.
- Including the knowledge of people affected: particularly by answering the questions that they need answered.

Time for QandA!

Thank you!