

Balancing accountabilities and ethics in humanitarian evaluation

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In this presentation

- 1) Introducing different accountabilities and ethics dimensions in humanitarian evaluation
- 2) Reflect on whether there is dichotomy between accountability and ethics in HE
- 3) What can evaluators do



On accountabilities

Public funding allocated to respond to crises brings multiple accountability requirements including to:

- **Funders (and taxpayers)**
- **Crisis affected populations / beneficiaries**

"Upward" accountability often dominates



accountabilities – necessarily plural!

, including evaluation to donors. What about accountability to so called beneficiaries? Can HE genuinely reconcile these 2. If yes How? Considering issues of humanitarian principles, access issues;

Can EHA genuinely reconcile the two accountabilities?

Reconciling "upward" and "forward" accountabilities in Humanitarian Action considering:

- a) **Humanitarian principles**
- b) **Access issues**



On ethics in evaluation

UNEG (2008) Foundation text for UN evaluators and beyond. Focus on:

- Responsible use of power
- Strive for credibility
- Responsible use of resources

Evaluation at any cost? .. and in all contexts?

How far should we ethically go, in the pursuit of accountability & learning

Evaluation at any cost?

Conducting evaluations in humanitarian contexts can often expose people (eval staff, aid workers and beneficiaries) to risk.

Accountability and ethical considerations under strain in humanitarian crisis contexts

Key issues , key determinants to consider:

- 1) Massive power differentials
- 2) Limited / incomplete/ untimely information about the situation; about inputs; about results
- 3) Danger to life and livelihoods

massive power differential: limited info about situation, inputs or results (and that info often controlled by the implementing agency themselves); danger to life and livelihoods

Decisions can impact on lives and livelihood

False dichotomy

- The challenge is **balancing different lines of ethics that call for different “types of accountability”** (upward, forward etc.)
- EHA should inform decisions on **best use of scarce resources to bring about positive humanitarian outcomes** for affected populations.

Dichotomy between accountability and ethics is a false one.

When is EHA compromised?

- If the quality (process and product) in EHA is compromised, so is its ethical profile. e.g. takes people's time; can affect their safety.

So need to focus on:

- a) Quality of design
- b) Focus on quality of evidence including accuracy, addressing bias; representativeness
- c) Support uptake and use of evaluation results

Doing evaluation badly can be unethical

A poor quality evaluation that generate poor quality evidence that doesn't contribute to inform those decisions on whether and how best achieve humanitarian outcomes using scarce resource available –is an evaluation that is compromised not only from a quality perspective, but also from an ethical one.

Not commissioning and using evaluation, or doing badly, is unethical (to donor public; to future populations who might receive unfit goods / approaches; according to the humanitarian imperative of 'presence' – being there with and not letting people be forgotten)

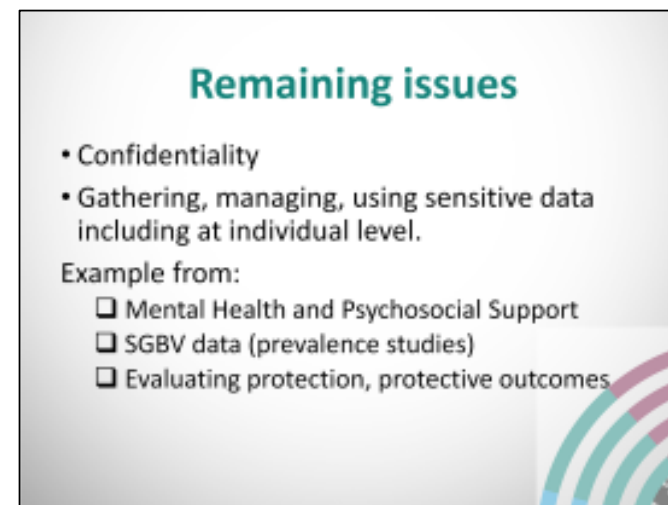
So –

Need to design right, for methodological accuracy and to ensure that the evaluation does not further hide information

Need to:

- A) Commission, design, facilitate, carry out EHA that use credible and high quality processes to generate **credible and high quality evidence** (e.g. WFP EQAS; UNICEF GEROS quality of evidence work by ALNAP)

B) Supporting uptake and use of evaluation results



Even if we strive to ensure high quality and credible evidence, there are remaining issues –

There will still be ethical balance to be struck around for example:

Confidentiality

Sensitivity of (primary) data gathering on issues of MPHSS / SGBV

What can evaluators do

- **Be alert:** recognise those different lines of accountability and how they influence an evaluation
- **Build space to ask difficult question in evaluation** - build space to let different stakeholder express and deal with disagreements



e.g. upward accountability eval question differ from AAP-oriented eval questions

What can evaluators do (con.d)

- **Be transparent about eval. purpose and whose questions you are answering** (donor/ taxpayers/agencies' board / field staff / Host Gov. local actors/ affected population)
- **Consider the use of guiding principles for evaluator** rooted in social science ethical research protocols – e.g. **human subject research.**



don't try to be everything to everybody with a single evaluation exercise ..

Thank you

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