

ADVOCACY EVALUATION

# Monitoring and Evaluation for Human Rights Organizations: Three Case Studies



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## Introduction

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The promotion and protection of human rights around the world is driven by principles of transparency and accountability. These same principles drive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts. Yet, conceptual, capacity, and cultural barriers often discourage the use of M&E in support of human rights work.

**These case studies profile the monitoring and evaluation efforts of three human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs).** They are intended to support efforts within the human rights community to explore and tackle M&E challenges by providing concrete examples and transferable lessons about how to integrate M&E in useful ways. The cases emphasize both the methodologies used and the organizations' efforts to build internal M&E capacity and support.

- 1. The International Secretariat of Amnesty International** is using an internally developed impact monitoring framework, along with accompanying simple tools and processes, to plan activities and learn from campaigns. A team of internal evaluation and monitoring professionals supports the use of these tools, while also cultivating nodes of support among staff in order to build an organizational culture that values M&E.
- 2. The International Commission of Jurists** is adapting donor-mandated M&E requirements into useful, relevant, and internally operated systems. The case study shows how the organization adapted a traditional results framework to its human rights work, and it highlights the benefits of constructive evaluation experiences for promoting internal M&E support.
- 3. Crisis Action** demonstrates how the systematic use of relatively easy-to-use M&E tools can support collaborative advocacy around conflict-related crises. The organization's experience demonstrates how short-term feedback loops can be integrated into international advocacy campaigns with minimal resources.

The three case study organizations differ substantially in size. They are presented in this report in order from largest to smallest in terms of number of staff.

These organizations have been candid about their M&E challenges and experiences. All three were motivated to participate by a desire to share learning with other human rights organizations and to contribute to the further development of useful evaluation practices.

## What Is Human Rights Work?

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*Human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. Humans are all equally entitled to human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible.<sup>1</sup>*

**H**uman rights work is organized around fundamental principles that all humans should have access to basic rights and is focused on protecting and promoting those rights. These principles, which are set out in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, are backed by numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions.

NGOs play an important role in monitoring, promoting, and protecting human rights. The work itself is multidisciplinary and can include a broad range of related activities, such as public education, training judges and lawyers, providing legal defense to political prisoners, policy advocacy, and researching and documenting human rights issues.

### Examples of Human Rights Work

- *Supporting people to claim their rights and strengthen laws and policies.* For example, Roma people—the largest ethnic subgroup in Europe—are subject to discriminatory practices, such as forced evictions from informal settlements. Groups such as Greek Helsinki Monitor and Amnesty International are working with Roma activists and communities to pressure the European Commission and governments in Europe to stop forced evictions and other discriminatory practices toward Roma people.<sup>2</sup>

This work also can be narrowly focused and localized. For example, the rights of undocumented Mexican and Central American workers on Vermont's dairy farms are being promoted by a small grassroots human rights effort in the state. In early 2013 the advocates successfully lobbied the Vermont state legislature, which passed a provision enabling migrant workers to obtain drivers' licenses regardless of their immigration status.

- *Helping individuals seek redress for human rights violations and amplify attention to issues.* For example, in 2013 a Salvadoran woman pregnant with a nonviable fetus and suffering from serious health complications sought support to end her potentially life-threatening pregnancy. Abortion is illegal in El Salvador even when a woman's health is at risk, and procuring one can result in a jail sentence of

<sup>1</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2013). *What are human rights?* Retrieved from [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Europe (2013, May 30). *Court rules against Greek Roma school "ghetto."* Retrieved from [www.humanrightseurope.org](http://www.humanrightseurope.org).

up to 30 years. The woman was supported by Salvadoran, regional, and international NGOs such as *Catolicas por el Derecho a Decidir-El Salvador* and the U.S.-based Center for Reproductive Rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights intervened on her behalf as well, in a non-binding ruling mandating that Salvadoran officials allow necessary steps to preserve the 22-year old woman's life, personal integrity, and health.<sup>3</sup>

- **Strengthening and protecting human rights mechanisms and policies.** Human rights organizations have been monitoring a review of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) being undertaken by its oversight body, the Organization for American States (OAS). The International Coalition of Human Rights Organizations in the Americas—representing more than 700 civil society organizations from different countries in the region—has petitioned against what it believes are efforts to weaken the IACHR and has made proposals for improving its effectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

**Advocacy is threaded throughout efforts to promote and protect human rights.** Advocacy is about influencing power dynamics to secure or resist social or political change. Like others working to advocate for international development and humanitarian programs and policies, human rights advocates operate in a power-charged, contested, and constantly shifting context.<sup>5</sup> Change involves complex and often fluid chains of influence, rarely linked to one action. Results often are markers of progress in the right direction, rather than a solid end state. All of these variables create challenges for traditional evaluation methodology, which prefers interventions to be more predictable, linear, and controlled.

## Evaluation and Advocacy

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**E**valuation, at its core, is about untangling the threads of what happened, why, and to what effect. It aims to do so using theory-based approaches and methods, with the goal of producing information that is accurate, reliable, and useful. Choosing the evaluation method often depends on the type of effort being evaluated—programs and direct services are best served by some approaches, while others best serve advocacy.

**The field of advocacy evaluation has recently emerged with approaches and methods suitable for a complex and less predictable advocacy environment.** Advocacy evaluation's function has followed advocacy's form, shaping strategies to the particular characteristics of advocacy work. As described above, these characteristics include complex change scenarios with multiple variables influencing policy change and other advocacy outcomes. The adaptive and emergent nature of advocacy efforts also presents unique challenges—effective advocacy efforts shift according to windows of opportunities rather than adhering to a rigid model or plan.

Advocacy does not require a whole new way of doing evaluation. Rather, it requires adjustments and innovations in both evaluation thinking and in methods to ensure that evaluations are both relevant and useful in an advocacy context. There is no one right way to evaluate advocacy—extraordinary variation

<sup>3</sup> Zabludovsky, K. (2013, June 4). Woman who sought abortion in El Salvador delivers baby. *New York Times*.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Justice and International Law (2013 July). *Debates at the IACHR*. Retrieved from [cejil.org](http://cejil.org).

<sup>5</sup> Coe, J., & Schlangen, R. (2011). *Looking through the right end of the telescope*. Washington, DC: Center for Evaluation Innovation.

exists and methodological innovations are still emerging. On the whole, however, advocacy evaluation does the following:

- emphasizes the use of data and learning *while advocacy efforts unfold* in addition to more traditional end-of-project reviews;
- often puts tools in the hands of advocates so they can systematically and robustly review their own progress and apply what they learn. Another common approach is to embed evaluators within advocacy teams. Rather than standing outside of the advocacy effort and judging it, this approach makes evaluators part of the team so they can feed helpful information and analysis directly into the advocacy effort.<sup>6</sup>
- constructs plausible explanations supported by evidence about the outcomes of advocacy efforts and how organizations contributed to them, but typically does not try to establish definitive cause-and-effect connections; and
- often hones in on the effectiveness of particular advocacy tactics, such as media and communications, community mobilization, and coalition development efforts.

**Advocacy evaluation is evolving, generating, and testing new approaches.** It continues to wrestle with various demands and expectations that include, for example, translating nuanced outcomes and analysis into quantitative measures that are accurate and defensible.<sup>7</sup> Evaluators engaged in advocacy also are working to understand and respond to the needs of advocacy actors, including those in the human rights field, by producing tools and methods that are sound, reliable, and most of all, useful.

## Shared Evaluation Challenges for Human Rights, Advocacy, and Development Efforts

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**T**he rapid expansion of NGOs involved in advocacy in many forms has fueled the advocacy evaluation field's development. Yet, human rights organizations have not prominently figured among the early adopters of these efforts.

**Human rights organizations tend to perceive many deterrents to evaluation.** These generally fall into three categories: conceptual challenges related to the unique nature of human rights work, the organizational culture of human rights organizations, and evaluation perceptions and capacity.

Table 1 identifies specific evaluation challenges in these categories.<sup>8</sup> It lists them side by side with challenges faced by organizations that conduct international development work and advocacy.

<sup>6</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Barkhorn, I., Huttner, N., & Blau, J. (2013). Assessing advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring).

<sup>8</sup> Challenges are drawn from: Carr Center for Human Rights (2005). *Measurement and human rights: Tracking progress, assessing impact*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University; Gorvin, I. (2009). Producing the evidence that human rights advocacy works. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 1(3), 477–487; Gready, P. (2009). Reasons to be cautious about evidence and evaluation: Rights-based approaches to development and the emerging culture of evaluation. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 1(3), 380–401; Guendel, L. (2012). Evaluation, public policies, and human rights. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 134, 29–37; International Council on Human Rights Policy (2012). *Assessing the impact of human rights work: Challenges and choices*; Geneva, Switzerland: Author; Raine, F. (2006). The measurement challenge in human rights *Sur: Revista Internacional de Direitos Humanos*, 3(4), 6–29.

**Table 1. Evaluation Challenges for Human Rights Compared with Development and Advocacy Efforts**

	HUMAN RIGHTS	Also a challenge	
		DEVELOPMENT	ADVOCACY
<b>NATURE OF THE WORK</b>			
Prescriptive and normative based on legal frameworks and moral imperatives, rather than operational	✓		✓
Complexity of problems, change proposition and/or environments	✓	✓	✓
Change or impact is a very long-term proposition and/or systemic	✓	✓	✓
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES AND WAYS OF WORKING</b>			
Change is achieved through contributions of many actors	✓	✓	✓
Highly adaptive, limiting utility of linear planning	✓		✓
Culture of intuitive, anecdotal assessment of effectiveness rather than systematized processes	✓		✓
<b>PERCEPTIONS OF EVALUATION AND EVALUATION CAPACITY</b>			
Work is culturally contextual, defies comparison of indicators and outcomes across countries and cultures	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation should be quantitative; qualitative evidence lacks methodological rigor	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation introduces the risk of driving work to demonstrate results	✓	✓	✓
Perception that evaluation requires definitive attribution of impact or proof of contribution	✓	✓	✓
Difficulty demonstrating a connection between work and impact on people's lives	✓		✓

These three types of efforts are similar in that there often are diffuse connections between the work and the changes being sought; it is difficult to attribute change to a particular intervention when the work occurs in a complex environment; the timeframe for change often is extended and unpredictable; and the ultimate purpose is to make people's lives better, but measuring this change can be elusive.

As Table 1 illustrates, most of the evaluation challenges cited by human rights organizations are shared to some degree with organizations engaged in advocacy and development/humanitarian efforts. Given the similarities, there are untapped opportunities for human rights organizations to learn from other programs and sectors about how to approach evaluation. The case studies featured here have looked to and applied lessons from these fields.

## Unique Evaluation Challenges for Human Rights Work

Other deterrents to effective evaluation, however, are relatively unique to human rights work. The aim of this brief and the three case studies is to amplify and discuss these deterrents and examine how several organizations are addressing them. Rather than interpreting these issues as arguments against

evaluation, they should be used to help guide the design of evaluation approaches to make them useful to human rights work.

**What is measurable is potentially at odds with what is right.** The moral imperative of human rights work means that results can be amorphous, long-term, and potentially unattainable—the opposite of measurable. As one human rights advocate articulated:

*I spent eight years defending political prisoners. There was no hope of their release. I lost every case. What was my [observable] impact? Zero. Should I have done it? I haven't found one person who says no. So, that's an issue. How do you really measure your capacity for transformation when not much transformation happens in front of you?*

In addition, planning for a specific result at a specific point in time risks oversimplifying human rights work. The drive for specific measures can mask complexity and can have unintended consequences as illustrated by the following quote from another advocate.

*We used the number of political prisoners [as an indicator]...The numbers went down but it might be because the government was just shooting prisoners instead of holding them.*

The case studies illustrate efforts to address related challenges. The International Secretariat of Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists use frameworks to clarify connections between human rights activities and outcomes. M&E staff emphasize, however, that making a meaningful connection between high-level change goals and programs or campaigns remains difficult.

**Human rights are normative and prescriptive; evaluation serves the operational.** Human rights work is guided by human rights law, which declares what individuals have rights to but does not set operational terms (for monitoring or programming) against which work can be evaluated. For example, as one advocate said, a significant challenge to evaluating human rights work is the difficulty in measuring whether rights are accessible.

*Laws and policies are not an endpoint. They are tools of empowerment. Unless people have access to remedies we aren't actually making a change...We don't do enough to see what the changes in people's lives are...I don't know that we have the right tools yet.*

Lack of standardized and operationalized definitions across the field does not help. As an evaluator with a human rights organization explained:

*Hard data on human rights is either scarce or unspecific. For example, torture is never quantified, but experts use qualifiers like “widespread” or “systematic.” It's pretty different from measuring children's access to school.*

The International Commission of Jurists' case study provides an example of translating the normative into operational by using assessments of *concrete progress* toward longer-term change.

**Perceptions of evaluation orthodoxy have a chilling effect.** This barrier is not unique to the human rights sector, but bears emphasis because it is so predominant in the literature and in conversations with human rights experts. There is a sense that evaluation is about numbers, certainty, attributing cause and effect, and about looking backward rather than forward. There is a sense that evaluation requires adherence to a strict set of conventions, centering on numbers, absolute proof, and demonstrable impact.

This perception is not baseless, and certainly organizations feel pressure to fit their work into awkward evaluation frames or to distill complex work into quantifiable measures. However, there are also many misperceptions about evaluation. As one evaluator with a human rights organization expressed:

*For many colleagues log frames are the stuff that comes from another planet...it's a fear of something you don't understand and that becomes a refusal and a rejection. On the other hand, evaluation professionals...we must counter that there's a tremendous gap in terms of adapting to the human rights sector.*

Examples of strategies to address this challenge are found in Crisis Action's use of uncomplicated tools, International Commission of Jurists' ability to fit its work into a logic model frame, and Amnesty International's efforts to support an internal evaluation culture. All case study organizations were clear that their systems are a work in progress and that building support and buy-in throughout the organization are equal priorities with the development of systems and tools.

## Lessons

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Each case study concludes with lessons and recommendations for other human rights organizations, donors, and evaluators. From these, common lessons emerged across all three.

### Lessons for Human Rights Organizations

- *Regularly review and refine M&E practices.* Approach the process as iterative and long term, starting with simple tools and working toward more complicated approaches as relevant.
- *Invest in internal M&E capacity.* While M&E tools are important, it is equally important that organizations develop the confidence and capacity of staff and managers to use them. Invest in training and support for staff and managers.
- *Recalibrate expectations of evaluation.* Recognize that in a human rights context evaluation can rarely, if ever, definitively capture attribution in complex change scenarios. Evaluation can, however, capture the contribution of an NGO. Also, understand what is possible with each level of investment.

### Lessons for Donors

- *Support and facilitate M&E capacity.* Back up M&E requirements with support for implementation. Doing so will support the quality of grantees' internal M&E work and collaboration with external evaluators.
- *Tailor expectations for results.* Align the level of results grantees are expected to capture or measure with what is reasonable with the M&E resources available. Doing so will produce reporting that is more robust and credible.

- *Develop more flexible M&E requirements.* Frames developed for humanitarian and development projects may not be sufficiently flexible for human rights work. Consider enhancing flexibility, including a more expansive view of results.

### Lessons for Evaluators

- *Contribute to evaluation strategies that respond to human rights work.* Support processes within the evaluation and human rights communities to develop methods and approaches relevant to human rights work.
- *Support a more holistic understanding of evaluation.* Contribute to evaluation capacity in human rights organizations, emphasizing a breadth of evaluation methods and approaches. Work with human rights organizations in a more embedded or developmental way.

### Monitoring and evaluation practices are most useful to human rights work when they:

- DEMONSTRATE accountability externally to donors and supporters but also demonstrate benefits internally to the people doing the work,
- SUPPORT internal evaluative thinking,
- CONTRIBUTE to priority setting and planning, and
- FACILITATE learning that can be applied to advocacy strategies.

## CASE STUDY International Secretariat of Amnesty International

### Organizational Facts



### Mission

Amnesty International's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. In pursuit of this vision, Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of these rights.

*This case study illustrates how the International Secretariat of Amnesty International is using a common impact monitoring framework to plan M&E methodology, learn about M&E results, and report on the results. A relatively small internal Strategy and Evaluation Unit (SEU) team spearheads these efforts, combined with strategies to build a culture of evaluation within the organization. The case study was developed based on input from the SEU team lead and several staff involved in designing and testing the organization's M&E approaches, who candidly shared their experiences.<sup>9</sup>*

## The Human Rights Work

**A**mnesty International seeks to disclose and end human rights abuses accurately, quickly, and persistently. The organization researches the facts of individual cases and patterns of human rights abuses, and then publicizes them. Members, supporters, and staff then mobilize to put public pressure on governments and others to stop the abuses.

Amnesty International also advocates for all governments to observe the rule of law, and to ratify and implement human rights standards. The organization carries out a wide range of human rights educational activities, and encourages the widespread support and respect of human rights.

## M&E Challenges and Opportunities

**L**ike many advocacy organizations, Amnesty International grapples with questions about whether the organization's strategies can be evaluated and what success means in a human rights context. An example of how human rights workers may interpret "success" is illustrated in the following anecdote from an International Secretariat team member.

<sup>9</sup> The case study reflects the views of these respondents, and does not represent the views of the entire International Secretariat of Amnesty International.

*I was in a community in an informal settlement at risk of being torn down...and there was an Amnesty banner sitting around. I asked, 'Why is that banner laying there?' They said 'Every time we see police coming we put up the banner because it gives the police [the idea] that Amnesty is watching this community. It scares them and they go away.'*

While some might claim the anecdote as a sign of success—a community protected—for this human rights worker it was an indicator of unfinished work. As the team member said,

*That's an indicator, yes, but of what we need to do. It tells us that the community is becoming dependent on Amnesty, rather than claiming its own rights. So what are we doing to support communities to claim their own rights? We can't get at this with changes in laws and policies as the goal.*

Success defined in this way as a community's ability to exercise its human rights is a necessarily long-term goal, which raises challenges for organizations asked to report their impact on much shorter timeframes. A related concern is that a focus on showing impact potentially orients the work toward delivering short-term results but not lasting change and also may shift the work to ignore the really tough issues that may not change. For example, while there may not be short-term results for shining lights on human rights issues in countries such as China, that should not preclude the work from continuing.

Other measurement challenges for Amnesty International include:

- *Sometimes human rights "impact" is not observable.* Work that is preventative or focused on preventing a situation from getting worse is difficult to measure, as are efforts to prevent actions that often are unreported, hidden, and illegal. As one staff member explained:

*For my work, and I think for lots of other colleagues, there is definitely a question that specific, measurable indicators are not possible to have in all our areas. If we're trying to prevent executions, just counting executions in some countries is problematic.*

- *There is perceived pressure to quantify results based on a prevailing sense that numbers express progress and report results more certainly and legitimately.* Amnesty International makes an effort to capture simple quantitative data—usually in the form of outputs or intermediate outcomes. But attempts to quantify outcomes using subjective assessments can be seen as lacking rigor while failing to capture the nuances of changes catalyzed through advocacy. At the same time, there is a tension between the demands for quantifying advocacy outcomes and the need for more meaningful qualitative analysis to better understand the organization's contribution.
- *Demands for enhanced rigor are difficult to meet.* The types of evaluation designs considered most rigorous require considerably more time and financial resources than are currently available.
- *Concerns exist around measuring the organization's contribution.* Amnesty International endeavors to measure the contribution of its efforts to improve a situation, rather than using a cause and effect approach to attribute a specific change to the organization's work. Still, the nuances of contribution are a concern. As one campaign lead explained, "We know how many people we mobilized, but [we

don't know] how much that contributed to change. Was it instrumental or only complementary? It is very difficult." Similarly, when participating in a long-term or widespread cause, such as the closing of Guantanamo Bay, measuring Amnesty International's unique contribution is challenging.

**Amnesty International also grapples with organizational and cultural issues around the adoption of M&E practices.** These include internal and external motivations for engaging in M&E practices.

- *The organization's funding structure both stimulates and stymies M&E.* Individual donations are the organization's primary funding source, and these funds are free of the M&E requirements typically attached to government or foundation grants. In the absence of donor-mandated M&E approaches, as the SEU senior advisor noted, staff "are free to experiment" with ways to measure impact and demonstrate accountability to supporters. "We can develop the tools we think best." The flip side is that the motivation to advance internal M&E must be largely self-generated. According to the SEU senior advisor, "The challenge is there is no pressure as such. When I work with teams who are getting grant funding there is more serious buy-in from those teams to measure and report."
- *As an organization composed of researchers and advocates, there are two overlapping camps of skeptics.* Some researchers, with their training in scientific methods, believe it is methodologically impossible to evaluate Amnesty International's work with an acceptable level of rigor. Then there are the campaigners, who traditionally rely on intuition and look forward to the next challenge rather than reflect backward. These groups may see little value in measuring work that has occurred in the past, particularly if doing so is imprecise.

**Finally, there is frustration that M&E is not yet living up to its potential in helping the field learn from experience.** As a staff member explained when expressing frustration with the situation in Syria, which has failed to move despite the global machinery working for a resolution [emphasis added]:

*In Syria you have the whole UN [United Nations] machine, the Arab League...but with all the legal frameworks in Syria we aren't able to change the situation. It also happened in Rwanda, Bosnia and Serbia... There [has to be] something with our M&E framework to give us alarm bells. A function [for M&E should be] to make us more ambitious...M&E should make us feel a bit more agitated, like "Guys...This work is unfinished business and unless we get proper monitoring systems we'll not know how far we have to go..."*

## M&E Frameworks and Tools

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**T**he International Secretariat of Amnesty International is undertaking a quiet internal revolution to address M&E challenges and build evaluative approaches that reflect its view of change through human rights work. The approach centers on a framework for change that links to all Amnesty International programs and campaigns at the community, country, and global levels. The organization's small internal SEU is leading the 500-member International Secretariat in designing, testing, and using these approaches.

Amnesty International initiated efforts to develop a more institutionalized approach to M&E in 2005 at the behest of the organization's leadership. Development continues today, with much work left to do to

cultivate support; engage staff throughout the organization; and to continue to develop approaches that are meaningful, efficient, and useful.

The International Secretariat’s initial foray into evaluation was called “The Friendly Project.” With little history in formal internal evaluation, and little precedent in the human rights community, The Friendly Project aimed to introduce M&E as a constructive tool for learning. As the SEU senior advisor explained, “People tend to get uncomfortable when you’re talking the alienating words of evaluation. It was about making it less scary.”

**As a starting point, Amnesty International needed a shared lens through which all aspects of the organization’s work could be viewed.** This was a significant technical challenge for a large organization with work that spans different levels—from global to community—and across different types of human rights. The SEU team heard about the “dimensions of change model” from other organizations investing in M&E thinking around advocacy and the team adapted the model to fit the organization’s needs.

Amnesty International’s model was derived from the organization’s vision and mission, and distills its theory of how human rights change is achieved (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Amnesty International’s Dimensions of Change Framework**



The framework expresses the ways in which the organization aims to make positive human rights changes, with each of the four dimensions (in the circles) representing one area of change: (1) activism and mobilization, (2) accountability, (3) policies, and (4) people’s lives.

These dimensions, in turn, relate to changes with respect to three broad stakeholder groups:

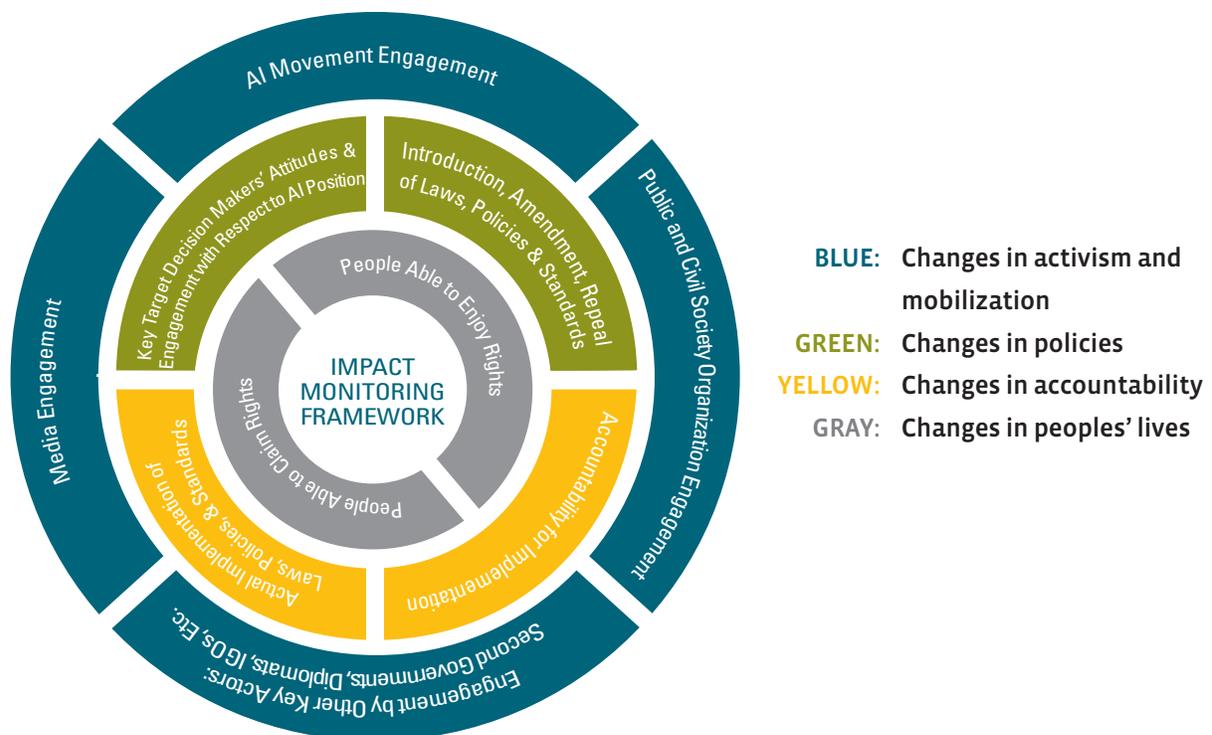
- various channels of influence, including the Amnesty International movement;
- decision makers; and
- people whose human rights are being violated or are at risk of violation.

The development and introduction of the dimensions of change model in planning and reporting processes was accompanied by an investment in capacity building and training. As staff slowly became familiar with the framework, they began raising substantive issues that could be used to refine the organization’s approach.

**The dimensions of change model then provided the foundation for a more complex impact monitoring framework.** This framework (Figure 2) outlines the mechanisms for understanding, assessing, and aggregating Amnesty International’s human rights impact. Within Amnesty International, impact is defined as any significant changes—positive or negative, expected or not—that result from the organization’s direct intervention or its contribution to improving a human rights situation.

In the impact monitoring framework, the dimensions of change fall in concentric circles, as illustrated by the color-coding. These general dimensions are then broken down into more defined elements and expressed as 10 broad indicators of what constitutes change under each dimension.

**Figure 2. Amnesty International Impact Monitoring Framework**



The development of the impact monitoring framework is instructive because it capitalized on the organization’s past M&E experiences. It also used participatory approaches to support buy-in. The SEU team collaborated with staff and managers working in five critical pathways (Amnesty International’s priority areas of

work) to develop, test, and finalize the framework. To assess its use for project-level review, reflection, and reporting, the framework was then tested with a number of projects.

**Amnesty International placed people at the center of the framework, while also acknowledging the challenge of measuring such changes.** Although human rights work and many other forms of advocacy are aimed at improving people's lives, measuring those changes often is a significant challenge for evaluators and advocates. For example, desired impacts may include the absence or prevention of something, such as the absence of torture or the prevention of a human rights abuse. As the SEU senior advisor explained:

*One of the [organization's] projects is the arms trade treaty. The people dimension is that as a result of that treaty being in place, arms won't be traded [to possible perpetrators of human rights violations] ... and people won't die, [but] there's no way of knowing to what extent they are actually affected.*

Given such complicated variables, many advocacy projects and programs place people at the distant end of the results chain, and efforts to measure related changes disappear as well. By placing people at the conceptual center of its framework, Amnesty International forces a focus on these changes and ensures that it acknowledges and continues to grapple with these measurement challenges.

**The programs and campaigns of Amnesty International's International Secretariat use the impact monitoring framework to plan, review, and report on results at the level of individual projects or campaigns.** They also aggregate results across themes, geography, and time.

The four broad dimensions of change guide the assessment of change. Teams review progress every six months, using the framework's 10 broad indicators or related indicators previously developed by teams. As part of this review, teams log progress into an online database to which other staff and managers have access.

## M&E Operational and Cultural Capacity Building

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*I see M&E as a long-term investment that goes beyond the tools and methodologies. They are very secondary. The primary thing is the culture and commitment. —SEU senior advisor*

**T**he usefulness of M&E tools and processes has been contingent on tandem efforts to ensure they fit with Amnesty International's work and organizational culture. Operationally, M&E has not been part of the organizational culture, and introducing change in a large organization can be difficult.

Amnesty International's structure and internal culture influences how the organization develops M&E approaches, and shapes how staff and managers engage with these processes. There are structural challenges to developing any system for a large organization, with different levels of work—from the community to global levels—and different areas of focus in terms of human rights issues.

**The SEU has a formula for addressing capacity and cultural challenges. In short, the organization works to build pockets of support rather than trying to bring everyone on board at once, and Amnesty International**

**uses simple accessible approaches.** The SEU is there to guide, build, and most importantly, to demonstrate how the use of evaluative thinking can strengthen the organization’s strategies, plans, and learning. The SEU team’s ambition is to fit M&E into the slipstream of the organization’s work, rather than configuring M&E as an additional component that sits over, above, or beside it.

Efforts to build pockets of support for M&E within the organization started from the ground up, with the development and testing of the impact monitoring framework. Rooting the framework in real-life organizational experiences helped staff to internalize it and encouraged buy-in. Staff from different teams helped to develop the framework, review its elements to make sure they applied to their work, and test the model. The SEU developed key blocks of supporters, who in turn became responsible for sharing expertise with their colleagues.

There is evidence that this approach is working. A campaign director described how his team uses the framework in planning:

*People feel they have to report against [the framework]. And we are increasingly using the language of monitoring. Even that word, just two years ago nobody actually would use that word easily. And now when people are planning global campaigns, they are asking: How do you measure success? What are the indicators on the pathways and what will be the milestones?*

**The spread of M&E approaches within the organization is slow and uneven, but progress is occurring.**

Progress requires a combination of leadership, prioritization, and staff seeing the value of the work. Some are recognizing that value, but there are still challenges to prioritizing the work among competing demands. One staff member, who works on global campaigns, was frank about this conflict:

Absolutely, 100 percent, M&E has been incredibly helpful for my work. Its really been pushed on me. ‘You’ve got to do this.’ Its resource intensive, and you wouldn’t do it if you weren’t forced, but once I’d done it I realized this is actually very helpful.

**Internal evaluation staff members help to model and mediate M&E in ways that build support for evaluation.** They do this in several ways, including:

- *Leading one or two significant evaluations each year.* These evaluations, often of global campaigns or high-profile work, garner a lot of attention.
- *Building on the ethos of The Friendly Project by emphasizing simple and accessible tools and processes that promote evaluative thinking.* The SEU team emphasizes the small things—evaluative processes such as critical reflections and how to do a “good enough” evaluation. As the SEU senior advisor explained:

*We [evaluators tend to] make M&E very complex, and we put off lots of people by making it very complicated. The language spoken by the core human rights people is very different from the way M&E people speak, so that’s a barrier.*

In response, the SEU team took steps such as de-emphasizing the use of terms like “outputs” and “indicators” in project plans and, instead, asks teams to respond to a series of questions that make M&E terms more accessible to human rights professionals. Questions include:

- What is the concern or problem that the campaign seeks to address?
- What is the change that this campaign tries to achieve (in the relevant dimensions of change)?
- What needs to happen to make this change? How would you know you are making progress?
- What are the major activities and outputs that this campaign will undertake to influence the envisaged change?

■ *Joining team reviews, offering a neutral perspective, and prompting analysis.* According to one staff member: “[The SEU member] would question, ‘are you sure it’s what [the data] are saying?’ It’s a helpful push.” Another agreed, “The conversations I have with our internal M&E team are very helpful. They ask questions that we would not normally ask ourselves.”

## The Lessons

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Measuring the work of an organization with more than 3 million members and activists worldwide who work broadly on human rights issues, many of them seemingly intractable, is a daunting undertaking. For more than a decade the International Secretariat of Amnesty International has been experimenting with internal approaches to monitoring and evaluating its human rights work.

The organization’s introduction of core, unifying frames, along with the its implementation of the dimensions of change and related impact monitoring frameworks, has been helpful in percolating the organization’s work through a shared change lens. Institutionalizing these and other M&E processes requires responsiveness to the nature of human rights work, the culture of the organization, and emphasis on evaluative approaches integrated into day-to-day work. Drawing on its experiences, Amnesty International has lessons to share with other human rights organizations, including the following:

- *It is okay to start simply and imperfectly.* Rather than becoming bogged down in overly complicated frameworks or frozen while trying to find the perfect approach, get started with something simple. As the SEU senior advisor commiserated, “Most of us are perfectionists, and unless it’s 100% right we don’t go ahead. [But] if you think like that you won’t go ahead.” Simple, accessible processes are useful to instill evaluative thinking. Concepts such as a “good enough” evaluation—a rapid, one-day team review—can have value.
- *Balance rigor and internal/participatory processes.* Prioritizing self-directed, low-resource internal learning as an integrated part of program work likely will translate into a trade-off in terms of rigor. Internal staff members are unlikely to have the skills, time or resources to make the kind of investment necessary to engage in the type of evaluation designs and processes considered rigorous. At the

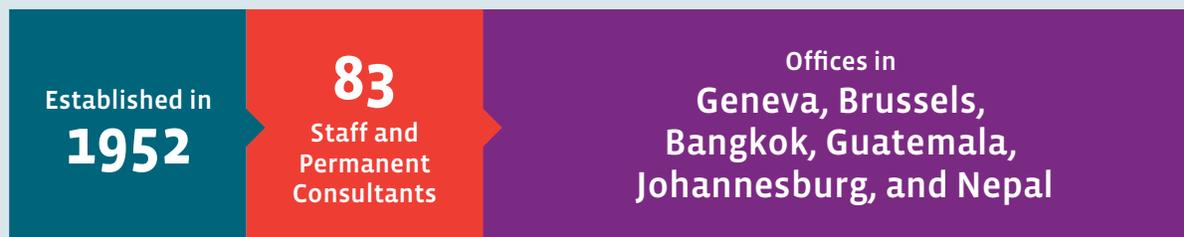
same time, purely rigorous approaches tend not to be useful for the real-time learning necessary to inform advocacy work. Upping rigor is important, but the SEU team will not do so to the extent that it requires changing to an expert-led process that sits outside of the organization's daily work.

- *Use internal experts to provide support to others.* Such experts are invaluable because they speak the language of the organization, know capacities and cultures of people and programs, and can use this information to build effective approaches. These experts can lead the creation of organization-relevant approaches and develop hubs of internal support and expertise. By setting up feedback mechanisms—for example, packaging and reporting back monitoring data and translating external evaluation report findings into internal lessons—they can make sure the results of M&E efforts are visible and utilized. ‘
- *Find people willing to experiment.* Build pockets of support by recruiting people willing to experiment and take risks, and these early adopters will, in turn, champion M&E efforts with others. Particularly in a large and diverse organization, buy-in can be very slow. Some people in the organization may be very resistant, while others will see the value in participating. As the SEU senior advisor emphasized, “There’s always someone who is willing to push up one step. Find out who they are, work with them, and demonstrate visibly what has been done.”
- *Leadership and political buy-in are essential.* Sustained support by organizational leaders and overall political buy-in is required to establish effective M&E as an organizational value. Management-level champions are a necessity, and this high-level support needs to be maintained through leadership changes. As the SEU senior advisor emphasized:

*If there’s no buy-in at the higher level there’s no way it’ll move. Without that you can have all the brilliant tools you want, but it won’t work. It’s not just a resource tool issue; it’s what you value.*

## CASE STUDY International Commission of Jurists

### Organizational Facts



### Mission

The mission of the International Commission of Jurists is

- to ensure that international law, especially human rights and humanitarian law, is used effectively for the protection of all people, particularly the most vulnerable, and is implemented through effective national and international procedures;
- to promote and extend the rule of law as a dynamic concept through which civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights are safeguarded and advanced;
- to advance the understanding that the rule of law requires that states, under the principle of separation of powers, develop effective executive, judicial, and legislative institutions and measures, such as checks and balances, to respect and protect the human rights of all; and
- to assist judges, lawyers, and prosecutors, acting under the highest ethical standards and professional integrity, to be independent, impartial, and free to carry out their professional duties.

*This case study illustrates a human rights organization's effort to adapt donor-mandated monitoring and evaluation into useful, relevant, and internally operated systems that resist the pressure to conflate accountability with countability. It discusses challenges with melding a drive to be results-focused with human rights work, and the benefits of constructive evaluation experiences for promoting internal support for evaluation.*

## The Human Rights Work

**F**ounded in 1952 at the dawn of the Cold War, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) is a seasoned advocacy organization, using the Rule of Law for the protection of human rights around the world. It was the forerunner in setting out the special role of judges and lawyers in preserving the independence of their profession. Starting with human rights abuses in post-WWII Soviet Union, ICJ has raised human rights abuses in apartheid South Africa, Franco's Spain, and Peronist Argentina. ICJ has participated in great waves of social and political change.

ICJ creates the legal environment and frameworks that allow advocates to hold governments and other actors accountable, and that strengthen national and international justice systems. This work takes a long time, and sustaining it requires constant vigilance.

**The organization has undergone a substantial transformation in recent years.** First, it shifted to region-based work after previously basing its international work out of the Geneva Secretariat. Nearly

three-quarters of the ICJ budget is now spent on activities coordinated from its four regional offices. Its size also has increased, growing in eight years from a staff of 16 to more than 60, in addition to over 20 long-term consultants. More than half of ICJ's staff members work outside of Geneva.

## M&E Challenges and Opportunities

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**T**he ICJ mirrors many of the M&E challenges expressed by other human rights advocates. Among other issues, the organization struggles with the following:

- a recalcitrance to claim victory based on experience with Sisyphean progress;
- timelines for change that can run for decades and that are unpredictable;
- developments that are incremental and uneven;
- the involvement of many actors, which makes it difficult to isolate one organization's contribution;
- a reluctance to claim responsibility because it could undermine trust and credibility with policymakers or other partners;
- an approach to change that is not linear; and
- skepticism about evaluation based on the view that it drives a focus only on results that are measurable.

ICJ also struggles with the reality that sometimes progress means making sure things *do not* change. As one ICJ manager emphasized, "There has to be a way to quantify that things haven't gotten worse." For example, maintaining a legal standard that people have struggled to achieve over many decades is "extremely important to prevent international courts from watering down the provision on torture." To be useful, evaluation needs to "show that [we] have played a role in preventing things from getting worse."

Finally, the legal culture of human rights organizations, such as ICJ, butts against an interpretation of M&E as promoting results not irrefutably supported by evidence. For example, the ICJ undertook an internal exercise to examine the results of court cases in which it had provided amicus briefs during a four-year time-frame. While it found positive outcomes in 70 percent of these cases, legal staff and managers did not find this information sufficiently reliable. The rulings were not black and white—there were no absolute wins. One ICJ manager said, "It came with all kinds of shades of grey."

**ICJ is using two donor-driven processes to try to meet these challenges and integrate M&E into its practices.** M&E practice within NGOs often is stimulated, guided, or directed by donors. Most recently, the trend among donors has been to get NGOs to articulate results and manage toward them.

As ICJ was undergoing its substantial organizational changes, one of its donors stipulated that its funding was conditional on an organizational evaluation. Subsequently, further funding was attached to the use of the donor's "results-based framework" (RBF) for planning, monitoring, and evaluation. ICJ used both opportunities to strengthen the organization and to build coherence and accountability, although these processes were not without challenges.

## M&E Frameworks and Tools

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**T**he first donor-driven M&E process was an organizational evaluation to help ICJ manage its recent changes. The organization's significant growth and shift from Geneva-based operations to primarily region-based work had major implications for operations, human resources, and planning. These were raised by the evaluation and tagged with more than 100 change recommendations.

While internally there was some resistance to the process, the evaluation ended up demonstrating to staff the usefulness of M&E. As a senior manager explained, "With the results in colleagues' hands, we actually realized it was quite useful."

ICJ managers devised an implementation plan for the evaluation's recommendations, many of which involved internal management pieces that were not in place, such as a gender policy. ICJ developed a spreadsheet to track each recommendation, assigned related action points and a team member responsible for each item, and then set deadlines for their implementation.

**The engagement with external evaluators was very positive both during the evaluation and after.** One evaluator was invited back to review the ICJ's progress implementing the recommendations. Another returned to help the organization develop a 2012–2015 organizational strategic plan, and then was hired to oversee a midterm evaluation of the plan's implementation. As described by an ICJ staff member:

*It was an excellent experience to work with those people. We set out to implement a plan of action based on that process. That was a process based on outcomes. We had to come up with results, and at the end of two years we have done it.*

To date, ICJ has implemented 95% of the recommendations. The experience demonstrated how evaluation can be a tool for managing change and positive growth. ICJ's experience supports an argument that evaluation is most useful when it has direct application and when it is useful to the people who are doing the work (as opposed to being useful only to the donors).

**The second donor-driven M&E process was the application of the donor's results-based framework (RBF).** Results-based approaches used by bilateral and multi-lateral donor agencies take different forms and often use varying definitions. The RBF used by ICJ's donor takes a familiar logic model or log frame approach, linking longer-term objectives to shorter-term outcomes, outputs, and activities. Each layer is measured by a set of indicators, with identified means of verification and targets.

A consultant was assigned to spend a week working with ICJ to apply the results framework. While using the RBF for a single project might have produced an elegant map, ICJ presented a more complex challenge. The organization was organized into both regions and thematic areas—such as economic, social, and cultural rights; and women's human rights. Accommodating all of this work quickly turned a simple framework into a bloated and confusing tangle. Populating the cells with measurable baselines, targets, and results ended up emphasizing information that was measurable but not necessarily useful and/or not a reliable indicator of change. As one manager said, "By the middle of the week, we were [at our wits' end]."

Then ICJ staff had an epiphany about how to make the RBF work—the solution provided an opportunity to **reframe the organization’s work**. They shifted focus; rather than organizing around themes and regions, the team identified five “strategic directions” across the organization:

1. access to justice for all;
2. accountability for human rights violations;
3. the independence of judges and lawyers;
4. business and human rights; and
5. the rule of law and international human rights instruments.

The RBF could then be completed for each of these strategic directions. This approach streamlined the process. As one manager described, “It reduced our tasks, because we didn’t have to look at results everywhere. It focused our attention to results as an institution.”

Reframing the organization’s work not only made sense of the RBF; even today it encourages ICJ to work as a more unified institution. According to a senior manager, “It allows us to look at interactions between regions and themes...to encourage colleagues to work more together.”

**ICJ also added an important twist to the RBF by adding “bridging” outcomes.** These outcomes address the gap between outcomes that are very high level and to which many efforts contribute, and ICJ’s direct work (see Figure 3). By “bridging” the gap between its outputs and the higher-level outcomes, ICJ introduced a level of outcomes more closely connected to its work and to which it can more confidently link results. Bridging outcomes fill a conceptual and measurement gap, focusing resources and attention to the role ICJ identifies as most strategic in each country.

**Figure 3. The ICJ Results Hierarchy**



**Example Outcome:** Access to justice by victims of human rights violations

**Example Bridging**

**Outcome:** Actions by lawyers and other human rights defenders in focus countries, based on analysis, recommendations, and support from ICJ

To aid in the development and measurement of bridging outcomes, ICJ is piloting a series of “access to justice” case studies in focus countries. These studies serve as baseline assessments, reviewing the issues and providing a set of recommendations or priority changes to address.<sup>10</sup> Progress toward implementation of

<sup>10</sup> The case studies are available on the ICJ’s website ([www.icj.org](http://www.icj.org))

the recommendations outlined in the studies will be interpreted as progress toward the bridging outcomes. In an effort to balance the use of quantitative data with qualitative data in terms of results, ICJ also conducts small-sample surveys with groups of stakeholders with whom the organization works directly. These surveys provide ICJ with a simple, cost-effective way to trace impact. For example in the case of advocacy, two to three years after conducting capacity building workshops, ICJ conducts stakeholder surveys with a sample of individuals trained in different countries. This follow up allows the organization to trace its long-term results and identify lessons that can be used for continuous improvement.

Another direct benefit of the RBF is ICJ's sharpened focus on *what* the organization measures. ICJ is working to balance the M&E burden on staff and resources with the need for information. Identifying "very clear, precise questions as to what information is called for" and encouraging the use of readily accessible monitoring information are two useful strategies ICJ is employing.

**While the RBF approach has been useful in creating a more coherent organizational map for planning and reporting, ICJ's use of a donor-directed approach has some limitations.** According to managers interviewed for this case study:

- *Operationally, implementing the framework to its full potential requires significant time and resources.* ICJ estimated the resources required to measure all indicators in the framework, but the organization has not yet found donors willing to foot the \$1 million bill for the four-year project. While understanding that M&E should be internalized, there are concerns about approaches that are mandated by donors but not supported by resources.
- *Not all managers are convinced of the value beyond demonstrating accountability to donors and aiding reporting.* ICJ has not yet realized a return on investment in terms of shaping how to approach its work, or understanding with sufficient precision whether the work is making a difference in people's lives.
- *ICJ has a range of donors, each with its own M&E approach.* ICJ hopes that demonstrated use of RBF will help inoculate the organization against having multiple systems. Changing M&E "fads" among donors also undermines confidence. "First it was results-based management, and now everyone is talking about Outcome Mapping. I can't sell another system to my organization."

Ultimately ICJ managers acknowledge, "We are better off with it [the RBF] than without it." In fact, ICJ's Executive Committee has been so enthusiastic about it that members requested extending the RBF to also include the organization's general administration, fundraising, and communications functions.

Planning around the RBF has lent structure and coherence to ICJ's strategic plan. This is no small feat for an organization with work that spans five regions. Staff members see the RBF as a tool that helps them think about outcomes. They see it both as useful for planning and as a method for analyzing *ex post facto*. The RBF, however, falls short of their expectations of how such frameworks should contribute to more effective interventions that advance human rights.

## M&E Operational and Cultural Capacity Building

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*I spent eight years defending political prisoners. There was no hope of their release. I lost every case. What was my impact? Zero. Should I have done it? I haven't found one person who says no. —ICJ manager*

**A**s discussed previously, a fundamental concern about applying M&E to human rights works is its perceived overemphasis on measurable and linear results. Not to be confused as squeamishness about transparency or accountability, the concern is that a focus on measurability or demonstrated change has the potential to steer efforts away from the difficult, intractable, or necessarily long term. Applying M&E frames to human rights work with an emphasis on results when results are unlikely is a significant risk. As one ICJ respondent explained, “There are many activities in human rights work that respond to an ethical imperative and not to a sequence of outcomes.”

As such, human rights organizations such as ICJ generally look at logic models and results chains with skepticism. They see them as stripping away context and freezing an intervention (or strategy) in time so that it can be measured and assessed.

**ICJ found a useful way to manage a results focus by reframing its work and introducing the concept of bridging outcomes that are shorter term and that capture results more directly tied to their work.** ICJ took a more constructivist approach, arguing that many variables shape desired results over time. The introduction of bridging outcomes helps the organization capture the prolonged, sustained attention ICJ gives to creating the legal environment and frameworks that allow advocates to hold governments and actors accountable.

### The Lessons

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**F**or M&E to make sense to an organization such as the ICJ, it had to be demonstrated as useful. After all, ICJ introduced M&E into an organization that has survived without it for nearly six decades. The M&E processes ICJ undertook, and its systematic approach to applying the learning that came out of that process, has led to lessons about how to successfully integrate M&E, even when the drive to do so comes from external donors rather than from within the organization. These lessons include the following:

- *Get creative with rigid frames.* While results-based frames and logic models or log frames may be rigid, ICJ's experience illustrates how they can be tweaked to make better sense for the organization. For example, bridging outcomes helped tie high-level outcomes more closely to ICJ's work. The organization also was creative in using the experience as the impetus to reorganize its work across strategic directions, rather than within thematic areas and regions. Finally, ICJ's use of case studies provided the organization with both situational analyses within countries and a baseline assessment of results frames.
- *Own the evaluation effort, but effective external evaluators can help.* ICJ's experience demonstrates how work with well-positioned, constructive consultants can make evaluation a palatable, positive learning experience. Evaluation efforts that are transplanted or that sit outside the organization often

undermine relevance of the approach and buy-in. With both the RBF and the organizational evaluation, ICJ worked to own the processes internally. ICJ strategically used consultants to help translate and adapt the RBF, but managed adoption within the organization. Other consultants supported ICJ's efforts to translate evaluation recommendations into practice.

- *Donor-designed M&E systems require flexibility and support.* While appreciating donors' efforts to boost accountability and measurement, ICJ's experience raises some lessons for donors to consider, including:
  - Frames may be more rigid than donors recognize, particularly when fitting an organization's entire portfolio into a frame that is perhaps better suited to a smaller-scale program or project. Donors should consider boosting flexibility and reconsidering requiring measurements for every level of the results hierarchy.
  - Bridge funding to support the integration of M&E into organizational budgets and practices is critical to assist organizations that already are stretched to capacity. Keep in mind that introducing a new system takes time and human resources, and efforts to measure progress and results are resource intensive. While grantee organizations should take on budgetary responsibility for this work, donors should provide support for this transition, along with technical assistance to ease the introduction and useful application of the systems.

## CASE STUDY Crisis Action

### Organizational Facts



### Mission

Crisis Action works globally across the civil society spectrum to protect civilians from armed conflict. It is a catalyst and converner of joint action whose work behind the scenes enables coalitions to act quickly and effectively. As a coordinating body, Crisis Action seeks no public profile or media spotlight; it is the voice of the coalition that matters.

*This case study demonstrates how the systematic use of relatively easy-to-use M&E tools can support collaborative advocacy as it is happening. The organization's experience demonstrates how short-term feedback loops can be integrated into international advocacy and campaigns around conflict-related crises.*

## The Human Rights Work

*The world watched in January 2011 as Sudan voted on the referendum on South Sudan's independence. The fact that governments and advocates in the region and around the world were paying attention was no accident. A global coalition covering 20 countries conducted coordinated campaigns toward those governments that had acted as 'guarantors' of the 2005 Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Policymakers instrumental in the process confirmed these coordinated efforts helped them to intensify efforts to ensure that the referendum went ahead on time and without violence.*

**C**risis Action works behind the scenes to mobilize global civil society to act collectively to protect civilians from armed conflict. Established in 2004, Crisis Action is an international NGO that brings together hundreds of leading human rights, humanitarian, peace, development, and policy groups to participate in coordinated campaigns to tackle some of the world's worst conflicts. With offices in place to target the African Union, European Union, Arab League, United Nations, and other relevant national governments, Crisis Action works with partners and affiliates across four continents.

Crisis Action's philosophy is that civil society is much more effective when organizations work together on common advocacy agendas. It uses an innovative model of building and facilitating "opt-in coalitions" to unite and galvanize international NGOs—such as Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Global Witness, and the International Crisis Group—in joint action with grassroots organizations. With collective advocacy campaigns, all parties have the potential to increase the impact of their responses to current and emerging conflict-related crises and to better protect those working on the ground.

The organization typically coordinates a small number of campaigns at any one time, and also launches emergency responses to rapidly developing crises. Over the past decade, it has worked on conflicts in Syria, Sudan, Congo, Burma, Lebanon, and many others. Crisis Action focuses its energies where partners and its own analysis identify the possibility of influencing government action that will make the biggest possible positive difference for civilians on the ground.

## M&E Challenges and Opportunities

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**B**ecause of its distinctive advocacy model and ways of working, the M&E challenges that Crisis Action experiences amplify those of other advocacy organizations. Those challenges include:

- assessing attribution or contribution—this is particularly difficult for an organization that maintains an intentionally low profile and works to elevate the work of other organizations,
- applying fixed measures and indicators to conflict-related crises that require constantly adapting advocacy strategies, and
- capturing impact when the mission is to prevent and stop violence against civilians in crisis situations, which means tracking things that *do not* happen.

Six years after its inception, Crisis Action undertook a careful process to identify and develop M&E tools it could use internally. The organization identified four priorities:

1. identifying the added value Crisis Action brings to the campaigns it coordinates,
2. measuring the key outputs of each campaign (including media coverage and the quality of campaign products),
3. capturing the outcomes and impact of campaigns on the decision-making targets relevant to those campaigns, and
4. learning how each campaign contributes to Crisis Action’s broader organizational objectives.

The guiding principal was that campaign teams should be able to apply M&E tools easily. As a staff member explained, “The campaign teams are already very busy, so we have to have light-touch systems that are not too cumbersome to use.”

At the same time, Crisis Action was clear about the level of rigor that these simple tools would produce. Most importantly, the organization was clear about and comfortable with the tradeoffs it was making between rigor and ease and timeliness of use. With these limitations in mind, the organization commissions external evaluations whenever it requires deeper, more rigorous study—such as that needed to test innovations or explore critical questions.

## M&E Frameworks and Tools

The first step in identifying appropriate M&E tools for the campaign teams was looking at what other organizations were using. With donor support, Crisis Action teamed up with evaluation consultants from Innovations for Scaling Impact (iScale), who identified a suite of M&E tools for Crisis Action to consider based on other organizations' experiences.

Crisis Action wanted to build M&E into each of the three stages of its campaign process—**planning, implementation, and completion** (see Figure 4). For its planning stage, which involves in-depth biannual reviews during which the organization selects campaigns and develops strategies, Crisis Action already employed an M&E tool in the form of clear criteria that staff and partners use to review progress and lessons from current campaigns and to assess potential future work.

Figure 4. Campaign Stages and Crisis Action M&E Tools



Crisis Action added M&E tools to support its campaign implementation and completion stages. The common denominator of these tools is that they involve reviewing and sharing perspectives with Crisis Action's campaign team members and partners.

**Two tools were recommended for use during campaign implementation—intense period debriefs and evidence of change journals.** One way evaluation often seems at odds with advocacy is that some of the best known and accepted methods produce information long after the work is undertaken. For human rights organizations focused on crisis situations, the resulting disconnect can be pronounced. These organizations benefit most from real-time information and analysis, not from complicated M&E approaches that can take months to implement and analyze.

The tools Crisis Action chose to pilot and subsequently roll out across the organization aim to capture information, learning, and analysis as events unfold or shortly thereafter, when the information is still fresh and more likely to be useful. These structured, reflective processes produce analysis that is channeled back into ongoing and future work.

**Intense period debriefs are a systematic way to review what worked and what did not, after particularly intense or critical advocacy moments.** Following a critical or intense campaign moment, the campaign lead circulates a brief set of questions to Crisis Action staff involved in the campaign, soliciting their reflections on successes and challenges. The tool responds to the inclination of advocates to keep moving forward, propelled by the urgency of the moment, with little time allotted for collective reflection. Crisis Action integrates the tool into its regular campaign processes.

Crisis Action added innovations to the debriefing process that correspond to its catalytic role, including the following.

- *Collaborators are engaged.* As a staff member explained, “We always speak to partners. What’s important is not evaluating Crisis Action per se. It’s not us that cause policy change, it’s the coalition, and Crisis Action drives it. So we can’t just do [the review] internally.” Crisis Action solicits opinions from coalition partners and shares reactions with them. The format depends on the moment and the actors involved. Information may be collected through one-on-one conversations, or more formally through electronic surveys or questionnaires.
- *Key policymakers are asked for their opinions.* Understandably, this information can be limited. As a staff member described, “Getting a sense of how the coalition has changed a policy debate isn’t easy. Policymakers can be very candid or they may not want to admit that NGO pressure was decisive.” Still, the conversations with policymakers whenever possible can provide useful feedback for tweaking future tactics and strategies.

The information collected during intense period debriefs is distilled into a succinct report outlining how the learning can be applied to future work. For example, these evaluation reports outline lessons related to campaign strategies, processes for working with partners, and internal coordination.

**Crisis Action also began using evidence of change journals, which are Excel workbooks populated with cells to note observed changes during campaigns.** The purpose of this tool is to facilitate ongoing tracking of new developments—some minor, some significant—that staff identify as related to the campaign. Crisis Action recognizes that the results it records are *observed* changes with possible links to campaign efforts. It is careful to qualify these observations as changes to which the coalition *potentially* contributed.

Staff members enter specific and concise entries related to:

- the result(s) observed,
- who observed the change and/or which Crisis Action office may be impacted by the change,
- how the change links to the organization’s theory of change,
- reflections and learning,
- follow-up, and
- how the tool might be improved.

As one staff member explained, the drop down menus help campaign staff to make quick judgments about whether something qualifies as a change. In this way, the design facilitates speed of use and efficient addition of data.

**Evidence of change journals are most useful when used regularly.** As two staff members underscored, if they are used only to track successes after they happen, the utility is limited. If, however, they are used regularly to provide trail markers of what looks like progress for campaigns, utility goes up because journals outline the development of results, some of which may prove significant later and others not. As one campaign staff member explained, the journal can be used in a dynamic way:

*I have a low bar for entry. I'll input things that might be an output if I think this might be something... say, if an ambassador responds positively to a conversation or if it looks as though this policymaker may be taking on board this message. At some point, I'll go back and follow-up to see if they came out with something.*

The campaign journal also provides a rich source of data to inform external evaluations, where and when they occur. By logging progress and capturing what is and is not working, the journal helps to create a picture of how individual pieces of an advocacy strategy contribute to collective goals and Crisis Action's theory of change.

**Crisis Action staff cite many benefits to the tools.** Both tools align with the rhythm of Crisis Action's campaign work. The regular ebb and flow of advocacy work creates clear moments to use them. Significantly, the tools facilitate reflective processes that draw on the experiences of Crisis Action teams and partners engaged in campaigns. For Crisis Action and its partners, "it's useful to look back and remind ourselves what happened," According to one staff member. Staff can revisit promising developments and trace further progress.

Other benefits of the tools include:

- promoting overall evaluative thinking within the organization;
- feeding lessons back into the campaign teams and across the organization; and
- reinforcing team cohesion internally, inviting different perspectives, and providing everyone with an opportunity to express their views about what happened.

**The tools also reinforce partner relations.** Crisis Action's M&E approaches intuitively draw on the strength of its campaign teams and coalition partners. Crisis Action's "opt-in" model of partner-based work means that partners join or sit out campaign activities based on their interests and priorities. The partners involved in any given campaign may expand and contract over time. As such, it is critical that Crisis Action involve partners in M&E efforts. In addition to supplying information and perspectives, one staff member observed that participatory review processes, "enhance a sense of ownership, and generate increased buy-in and a sense of coalition identity."

## M&E Operational and Cultural Capacity Building

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**W**orking through collaborative campaigns gives Crisis Action a particularly informed perspective on the potential of collective advocacy efforts. This perspective extends to views on how M&E could be used more effectively as a collective strategy to share learning within the sector.

**Because capturing the results of collaborative advocacy is challenging, Crisis Action deliberately engages regularly with partners, providing email updates and hosting consultative calls and meetings.** Coordination is Crisis Action's central strategy, so measurement of its effectiveness by nature requires information from partner organizations. Securing feedback from busy partners, however, can be challenging.

Another challenge is encouraging meaningful critical analysis with partners. Pressure to capture successes or to focus only on positive stories can undermine the value of these processes. Conversely, over emphasis on what could be done better can drive the review in a negative direction, leaving participants dispirited. When reviewing results with partners, achieving balance is particularly important to ensure useful feedback while maintaining an incentive to work together in the future.

**Crisis Action would like to see more efforts in the human rights and international advocacy sector to collaborate on evaluation.** For example, there is great potential for shared learning about collective action in response to human rights and humanitarian crises, such as in Syria.

Crisis Action is not alone in grappling with how best to measure how its work ultimately affects people's lives. As one staff member said:

*Often we...help coalitions engage in advocacy and everyone looks for impact in 48 hours. We do the evaluation and then that's it. Often the policy change or improvement on the ground happens six months later, 12 months later, but [at that point] no one is looking at it or tracking it. It's a problem across the movement.*

Focusing on crises can emphasize the shorter-term, but the real impact on people's lives typically unfolds in a different timeframe and the actual impact can be much more complicated to unravel. Still, there's a sense that with the right tools, M&E could better serve the human rights movement.

## The Lessons

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Crisis Action's approach to M&E is pragmatic. It prioritizes the importance of internal ownership of evaluation, backed, if need be, by well-targeted external evaluation support. The organization uses carefully developed tools to facilitate reflective processes and draw on the thoughts of its staff, partners, and to target policymakers (as relevant) across the global markets in which it operates. This helps to ensure that the perspectives gathered and results gleaned are well balanced and contribute knowledge to support strategic decisions. Other lessons also can be drawn from Crisis Action's experiences, including the following.

- *Open source the M&E function to generate ideas.* Crisis Action's M&E efforts benefited from the trials and innovations of others. Building off tools and lessons learned from other organizations and disciplines saves time and resources and allows human rights and advocacy organizations to overcome obstacles to defining their own internal M&E approaches.

- *Focus on simple, intuitive tools that help guide monitoring and reflection.* Good tools and the processes to use them bring out balanced and streamlined information. Light-touch approaches that fit into campaign processes are more likely to be used and to be useful.
- *Take the time to adapt and test tools.* The M&E approaches described in this case study arguably work well because time was taken to adapt them to Crisis Action's context and culture. Properly piloting the tools meant that select campaigns could test them and the tools could be further refined before they were rolled out across the organization. While the process to adapt and test tools and other M&E approaches can be time consuming, Crisis Action's experience suggests it is time well spent.
- *Negotiate with donors.* Crisis Action experiences the same pressure as many other organizations to translate its work into quantifiable measures. It proactively addressed this issue with its donors, keeping them informed about organizational progress with M&E. When asked by donors to use M&E approaches or measures that did not fit with its work, Crisis Action has responded with alternatives. Not all donors are receptive to such conversations. In Crisis Action's case, these conversations have been aided by positive relationships with long-term donors.

## About the Author

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## About the Methodology

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Case study organizations were selected based on their internal M&E systems and their agreement to be profiled. The aim was to present a set of case studies providing a range of experiences and representing different aspects of human rights work. Interviews were conducted with individuals within each organization responsible for developing and overseeing M&E, and staff and managers who use it. As some respondents wished to remain anonymous, sources of all quotes are identified by position rather than by name. In addition to interviews, participating organizations provided background documentation, such as evaluation reports, plans, frameworks, and internal reviews of M&E systems.

Other organizations not included as case study subjects also were interviewed, and these conversations contributed to a richer understanding of the interests of human rights organizations in M&E, the challenges they experience, and the approaches they are developing in response.

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