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Evaluating Social Change Communication for HIV/AIDS: New directions

by Ailish Byrne and Robin Vincent

Produced by the Communication for Social Change Consortium for UNAIDS

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Abbreviations

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CFSC	communication for social change
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
SCC	social change communication

Contents

Executive Summary

In this paper we explore a range of innovative approaches to evaluation that to date have been largely unknown or underused in the field of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Reflecting on dominant evaluation practice – in the context of wider shifts in HIV and AIDS programming – we highlight how innovations in evaluation and learning from various social sciences fields can be used to strengthen the assessment of social change, especially social change in how communities and individuals manage HIV.

There is growing interest in addressing the social drivers of HIV. Specialists working in the field urgently require support, at the conceptual and practical level, to develop evaluations that document the complex, multiply caused issues that underlie social change processes and the programmatic actions undertaken to change them. Experience demonstrates that lasting social change often results from multiple interrelated actions and conditions whose significance cannot be captured meaningfully without considering the wider or whole context. Social outcomes are typically emergent, stemming from many diverse and interacting influences. These features of social change raise significant questions about the adequacy of traditional linear, input–output–outcome–impact models for evaluation.

Programme communication, and specifically social change communication, is a critical strategy for combating social drivers of HIV vulnerability and risk such as HIV-related stigma, gender inequality and lack of respect for human rights. Reviewing how social change is understood and addressed in HIV communication interventions, we explore promising innovations in evaluation from diverse fields to show what relatively unknown, and fundamentally different, approaches can offer the evaluation of social change and social change communication for HIV.

We draw on theory and practice in participatory monitoring and evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, systems thinking and complex systems approaches. These include related innovations of whole systems action research, complex adaptive systems and social network analysis. We discuss their potential to capture the core social change communication principles of participation, voice, equity, local ownership, sustainability, collective learning and multiple accountabilities, and to stimulate further exploration and practical learning in the context of social change communication.

To realize the potential of social change communication for HIV, the following shifts in practice are recommended: (1) away from focusing solely on bounded projects towards more holistic,

longer-term, more sustainable approaches that attend to the real-life complexity of social change; (2) a focus on social processes rather than structures, and on dynamic and emerging relationships and networks between diverse development actors; and (3) a greater emphasis on action-oriented learning processes.

We emphasize the importance of keeping intended evaluation use and users at the fore; of responsive analysis of what unfolds rather than prediction; and of assessing contribution to, rather than attribution of, results.

Our aim is two-fold: to spark critical reflection on current practice in evaluation, and to foster greater interest in and support for experimentation with viable alternatives that do greater justice to the complex nature of social change processes.

The nature and timescale of social change pose serious challenges to evaluation. Such challenges include the complex nature of causality and programme impact trajectories, ever-present power differentials, the need to balance multiple perspectives, and the need to balance the demands of learning for programme improvement with accounting for and to multiple interests. Innovative approaches can pose challenges to deeply entrenched organizational cultures, hierarchies and ways of working. Change is needed both in communication practice and in evaluation if participation, voice, equity, local ownership, sustainability, collective learning and multiple accountabilities – defining principles of social change communication – are to be fully realized. We must also create nurturing organizational environments conducive to innovation, risk-taking, learning and positive change.

Emphasizing the importance of developing and adapting evaluation frameworks in situ, through the meaningful involvement of key stakeholders, we advocate for a spirit of creativity, responsiveness and innovation, in the interest of moving towards better, not best, practice. We stress that evaluation dynamics should match those of the system they are evaluating.

This paper is one component of an ongoing multistage research and learning process that seeks to increase awareness and evidence of the benefits of expanding evaluation practice to more effectively address the social drivers of HIV in programmes. The key content of the paper was developed in 2009.

Introduction

As experience demonstrates, lasting social change often results from multiple interrelated and interacting factors (Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004; Panos Institute, 2006). Social outcomes are often emergent rather than planned. Traditional linear-mode public health programme design and evaluation approaches typically require programmes to define their outcomes and map their impact trajectories in advance. Significant questions are raised about the appropriateness and adequacy of such models in the context of evaluating programmes that seek to catalyse and support lasting social change (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998; Estrella et al., 2000; Rihani, 2002; Rogers, 2008). Sustainable rights-based programming to reduce human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) risk and vulnerability requires social and structural factors such as gender inequality, HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and other human rights violations to addressed (UNAIDS, 2010a). The causal pathways and impact trajectories of interventions to promote social change relating to these and other social drivers of HIV risk and vulnerability differ from those focusing on immediate aspects of awareness, knowledge and behaviour, which have dominated programming to date (Woolcock, 2009). And yet the evaluation of HIV communication initiatives typically remains focused on short-term results that are attributed to specific projects. For these reasons, concern to address the social drivers of HIV is growing, but interventions and related evaluation approaches that cater better to the complex and multiply-caused character of issues such as stigma and gender inequalities remain underdeveloped.

Additional concern to better understand the dynamics of social change comes from recognition that relative success in some country responses to HIV, such as those of Uganda and Brazil, has involved widespread public communication, community mobilization and a combination of other factors well beyond the formal remit of health or development agencies.

Initiatives aimed at social change require programming that combines efforts at a range of levels (e.g. individual, relationship, family, group, organization) and that finds ways of achieving scale by aligning this range of interventions and facilitating dialogue and feedback between them, towards common objectives (Burns, 2007a; de Zalduondo et al., 2008).

To promote local initiative and action, interventions are needed at the district and national level to create enabling environments, including by addressing elements of social context such as gender inequalities and the criminalization of sex workers and other key affected and at-risk populations. These efforts should foster the participation of key groups (intended beneficiaries and others) and ultimately decrease their vulnerability to HIV. However, establishing which social factors contribute what to positive change, and to what degree, remains challenging because causality in social life is inevitably "complex and contingent" (Byrne, 2002, p.2). As we discuss later in this paper, the confluence of learning from participatory communication and social research, and emerging ideas from complexity science, provides renewed impetus to expand the framing of evaluation to address these challenges to facilitating, documenting and explaining social change.

There is wide agreement that the evaluation of social change and social change communication processes needs to be strengthened (UNAIDS, 2009). Lack of evidence adequately demonstrating the impact of social change communication – that is, providing evidence that social change communication strategies produce important positive changes at the population level – limits the availability of domestic and international funding for social change communication and has other negative consequences for development players. Questions remain as to whether the needed strengthening can be achieved through tweaks to public health evaluation approaches, or whether the planning and evaluation of social change communication require more fundamental change

(Woolcock, 2009). As HIV communication focuses increasingly on changing harmful attitudes and social norms – such as work in Latin America and the Caribbean to combat homophobic violence, and work in the South African Development Community region on multiple concurrent sexual partnerships – many organizations have mobilized and are actively seeking to strengthen the evaluation of social change communication trajectories and responses (see Box 1). To date, however, relatively few resources have been dedicated to the challenge. Consequently, the Social Change Communication Working Group of UNAIDS asked the Communication for Social Change Consortium (CFSC Consortium) to undertake research into ways of advancing the evaluation of social change communication efforts for HIV programming. This paper is a contribution to that broader mobilization.

Box 1: What is social change communication?

Social change communication, similar to communication for social change, is recognized as a promising approach to address the social aspects of HIV, AIDS and broader development issues (UNAIDS, 2007a). Relevant to diverse contexts, social change communication engages multiple and diverse stakeholders and initiatives in recognition that social life is inherently complex. Social change communication appreciates that social life is dynamic and that contextual factors shape and constrain the outcomes of individual action and programme interventions.

The Social Change Communication Working Group of UNAIDS has defined social change communication (for HIV and AIDS) as "the strategic use of advocacy, communication and social mobilization to systematically facilitate and accelerate change in the underlying drivers of HIV risk, vulnerability and impact. It enables communities and national AIDS programmes to tackle structural barriers to effective AIDS responses, such as gender inequality, violation of human rights and HIV-related stigma" (UNAIDS, 2007a).

By nature, social change communication is always embedded in wider social change processes. Social change communication is widely understood as an umbrella term referring to communication processes, initiatives and programmes that may differ widely in specific objectives, audiences and the mix of programme components but that are united by common underlying principles (UNAIDS, 2009). These core principles include:

- working strategically and collaboratively at multiple levels;
- engaging multiple and diverse actors, particularly marginalized and vulnerable stakeholders;
- using diverse and complementary approaches, methods and tools;
- explicitly addressing power dynamics that intensify vulnerability;
- catalysing and nurturing sustainable social change;
- addressing underlying drivers of social change;
- firm grounding in local contexts;
- using more holistic, systemic and longer-term approaches.

Together, the principles of social change communication (see Box 1) have implications for monitoring and evaluation approaches. In this discussion paper we outline exciting developments that can expand monitoring and evaluation of social change and make it more productive. We explore largely untapped resources from a number of fields that can complement the traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation that are currently applied to the field of HIV and AIDS.

We draw on theory and practice in participatory monitoring and evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, systems thinking, complex systems and soft systems approaches, including related innovations of whole systems action research, complex adaptive systems and social network analysis. These significant bodies of theory and practice are introduced to illustrate their potential and inspire further exploration in the context of social change communication. The strands of literature and practice on which we draw suggest that an evaluation framework that captures social change must be developed in context, given the diverse needs and objectives of communities, the fundamentals of complexity, emergence and diversity, and the influences of context that characterize the processes of social change communication.

The implications are far reaching. Lesser known "innovative" approaches pose significant challenges to organizational cultures, hierarchies and ways of working. They require openness to transfers of power and to organizational development and change. The need for attitudinal shifts, letting go and "unlearning" has been advocated by many leading development practitioners (Chambers, 2004; Guijt, 2007; Westley et al., 2006). Yet shifts in the approaches of practitioners and decision-makers must be balanced with concerns to ensure that people remain at the centre of the programmes, and that the affected communities and intended beneficiaries are the ultimate judges of success in HIV programme evaluations.

Structure of the paper

In Section 1 we highlight the social dimensions of HIV and AIDS and consider core challenges underlying social change processes. Section 2 briefly outlines critical evaluation questions and issues that should inform decisions about methodology and method. Section 3 considers the scope of evaluation in contexts of social change, with a focus on issues of causality and underlying theories of change. Section 4 highlights the challenge of ensuring indicators remain meaningful and useful, arguing that indicators should be complemented by approaches appropriate to social change processes. In Section 5 we briefly explore what several innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluation have to offer to the HIV/AIDS field. Building on these insights, we discuss the key elements of an expanded evaluation framework for evaluating social change and social change communication in Section 6. In Section 7 we offer recommendations intended to strengthen practice and consolidate learning.

1. Addressing the social dimensions of HIV and AIDS and understanding social change

HIV prevention must be able to deal with complexity: What makes the difference between a growing and a diminishing HIV epidemic is not merely net changes in individual behaviours, but dynamic shifts in sexual and social networks. Analytical tools need to be designed to capture these dynamics (Piot et al., 2008, pp.853–854).

HIV initiatives and their evaluation are overwhelmingly dominated by interventions that target individuals and their behaviours, with very few targeting social, policy or structural factors (Coates et al., 2008; McKee et al., 2004; Rugg et al., 2004). Longstanding recognition of the need to address social context in HIV interventions (UNAIDS, 1999) and dissatisfaction with the overly individual focused theory and practice of HIV programming (Airhihenbuwa & Obregon, 2000; Panos Institute, 2003) has fuelled contemporary concern to address the social drivers of HIV infection (Panos Institute, 2006; UNAIDS, 2006b) and renewed interest in the social vulnerabilities that mediate risk of HIV infection (Barrow et al., 2009; Stillwaggon, 2006). The widely endorsed UNAIDS communication framework of 1999 highlighted the need to address five dimensions of context: culture, gender, spirituality, policy and socioeconomic status. Despite drawing on extensive regional involvement, however, this framework has failed to substantially change practice.

1.1 Addressing social and structural factors

The scale of the challenge of concerted multilevel programming is evident from recent discussions on structural prevention and attempts to address the social drivers of HIV.[1] Frameworks developed to understand structural factors tend to distinguish three levels: (1) macro-structural factors – the social characteristics that impact on people's lives, such as racism, sexism and discrimination; (2) intermediate-level structural factors of infrastructure and service availability, neighbourhood characteristics and resources in the near environment; and (3) individual micro-level factors of socially mediated knowledge and skills (see Rao Gupta et al., 2008 and Auerbach et al., 2009).

1.2 Understanding social change

Despite important advances in understanding the significance of structural or social factors to HIV prevention, there remains a need to better conceptualize how social change happens and, in particular, the relationship between individual and social change. Clearer and simpler concepts are needed to communicate how these dynamics affect and are affected by HIV programming.

Critical social theory argues that individuals are always socially located and embedded – they are shaped by and shape prevailing social norms and social practice. Thus, what is conceived as "individual behaviour" is nested in a range of influences at different levels, which facilitate or constrain change at the individual level. The individual is "always social" (Kippax, 2003). To date, attempts to address social norms and social change in HIV have tended to treat social factors as either the aggregate of individual voluntary action or as things that are intangible and impossible to pin down. Both views are inaccurate and pay insufficient attention to social context and the way individual and social practice are intimately intertwined. This false dualism is reflected in

1 Structural factors have traditionally been understood as enduring social influences rooted in more fundamental causes. In this paper we use the terms "social" and "structural" more or less interchangeably. UNAIDS defines structural interventions as strategies that aim to alter the (social, cultural, political or economic) conditions that produce or impair health (UNAIDS, 2009b).

even relatively sophisticated frameworks developed to evaluate social change, which inadequately capture its complex and dynamic nature (e.g. Figueroa et al., 2003).

Relative successes in some country responses have illustrated the importance of broad social mobilization. In contrast to linear cause–effect models, the most widely known national success stories highlight how a combination of individual and social factors can converge in society-level mobilization and ongoing social change processes to fuel reductions in HIV infection (UNAIDS, 2010a). These have involved intensive public communication, widespread informal dialogue, community mobilization and other factors that are dependent on broad ownership and initiative – beyond the official policy and programmatic response – and that also reflect the particularities of national context (e.g. Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004). They point to the need to appreciate how multiple social factors interact over longer timeframes to produce sustainable change. In such locally specific and dynamic contexts, attempting to replicate and measure the effects of targeted interventions with prespecified and immediately measurable inputs and outcomes can produce results that are narrow and short-lived. More focused social movements, such as those around HIV in some countries, are also illuminating for the way they highlight the importance of the social processes of developing shared meaning and grass-roots initiatives, which may emerge outside of the official response (Vincent & Stackpool-Moore, 2009).

2. Critical questions: Evaluation for what, whom and why?

Analysis of ways to better evaluate social change communication in the context of HIV interventions brings to the fore critical questions relating to dominant models of development and social change, HIV/AIDS programming, evaluation and power, all of which have long fuelled important debates. Here we briefly highlight their implications in the context of social change communication.

Interest in strengthening evaluation processes has been evident for decades in the development sector. There is a need for better demonstration of policy and programme impact, and for ways that better capture the essence and achievements of development efforts and yet at the same time promote learning, organizational development and change. Demonstrating impact and promoting learning and change are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory, but to reconcile these objectives it is necessary to deal with critical questions about what is prioritized in an evaluation, why and for whom (Guijt, 2007, 2008a; Wallace & Chapman, 2003). Calls for more political rather than technical understanding of "accountability" that highlight issues of voice and justice are significant (Eyben, 2006).

There is a notable degree of excitement about "new" approaches to assessment of social change. Too often, critiques have focused narrowly on the merits or limitations of particular methods, while deeper critical thinking about the fundamentals of assessment is neglected. Which methods and tools are relevant will depend (implicitly or explicitly) on the interlinked areas of programme objectives, chosen strategy, theory of change, epistemology and other factors, as discussed below. These critical "bigger picture" issues cannot be overlooked if the monitoring and evaluation of social change communication is to be strengthened in ways that are consistent with the principles of social change communication outlined earlier.

Evaluation does not occur in a vacuum. Despite prolific rhetoric about participation, partnership and local ownership in development circles, the demands of required, externally imposed evaluations often serve to undermine these principles (Mowles et al., 2008) and to strain development "partnerships" (Vincent & Byrne, 2006). The widespread use of external evaluators, justified by a desire for "objectivity" and "independence", combined with dominant ideas about what counts as evidence, often precludes recognition of the value and validity of locally generated quantitative and qualitative assessments (Chambers, 2008, p.105). Like others, Callaghan (2008, p.400) urges attention to questions of "what evidence and whose evidence?".

To some extent, different social change communication evaluators will set different objectives, focus and methods for evaluations because they are interested in different components or aspects of either communication or social change, or both. No practical evaluation can cover everything, and so choices and priorities inevitably will be made. In part the choices made will be practical – based on the time, resources and experience of the people involved. In part the choices will be shaped by the theoretical and even philosophical preferences of the evaluators and the people and organizations that commission the evaluation. Given that the subject of social change communication is social, it is essential that the choices made do not exclude, confuse or conflate features that are essential to social context and social life – including meanings, motivations, emergent social structures and historical events – and the dynamics of all of these in driving relevant behaviour. For both practical and philosophical reasons, these essential features of the social have not received adequate attention in social change communication evaluation.

3. Addressing social change: The scope of evaluation

3.1 Complex causality in social change

A key issue for social change communication evaluation is where it is appropriate to expect a linear, one-way causal relationship between inputs and outputs, and where it is essential to use models that presume complex multidirectional, and thus less predictable, causal relationships. In the first instance, with the use of experimental evaluation designs, it is possible to show direct attribution. When describing the effects of a programme on complex multidirectional processes, it is realistic only to speak of contribution. The dynamics of social change and the social aspects of HIV call for an approach to evaluation that reflects and appreciates the "messy" (not easily categorized, complicated, multidimensional) and complex nature of lived realities and social change. Applying an experimental or quasi-experimental approach and seeking linear relationships can overextend attribution, prioritizing ease of measurement over content validity.

Despite widespread recognition of this reality in the social sciences, until relatively recently the evaluation of development interventions focused extensively on defining and confirming linear impact trajectories, aiming to establish clear causal links between activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. This explains the prevalence of logical frameworks. Logical frameworks can help the people involved think through the programme aims and processes and are useful for a "relatively narrow range of results-oriented management that is based on a simple logic model ... where both

staff activities and the results of those activities can be readily observed" (Rogers, 2008, p.34). But their application and ethical and practical relevance have been consistently questioned when it comes to understanding social action (Jones, 2009; Prowse, 2007). Their relevance remains limited in complex social change contexts. In fields such as social change communication and HIV/AIDS prevention, logic models should be complemented with approaches more suited to complex dynamic situations.

3.2 Theories of change underlying development initiatives

How we conceptualise a social and organisational system has an impact on how we structure it and how we intervene in it … this is crucial material for evaluators to engage with (Burns, 2007b, p.188).

To consider the impact of social change communication, and development interventions generally, we need to clarify and make explicit how we believe change happens in a particular context. This includes a clear picture of "success", of what we consider necessary preconditions for achieving and sustaining success, and of any intermediate outcomes that indicate that change is happening. In other words, we need to make explicit our "theory of change" (Keystone Accountability, 2008). A theory of change is usefully defined as "an observational map to help practitioners ... to read and thus navigate processes of social change" (Reeler, 2007). Proponents of utilization-focused evaluation and action research, among others, advocate a "grounded" inductive and dynamic approach to theories of change, rather than assuming that a model of change developed in advance can be applied to different contexts.

Degrees of simplicity or complexity in the phenomenon under investigation will inevitably impact on the suitability of different evaluation approaches. What are the implications for evaluating social change communication? A widely cited illustration of the differences between simple linear causal processes and complex, less predictable processes highlights how simple, complicated and complex problems each call for distinct responses (Table 1). These broad distinctions can enable elements of an overall evaluation framework to be identified and selected appropriate to particular social change communication contexts (see Section 6).

Table 1: Simple, complicated and complex

Simple	Complicated	Complex
Baking a cake	Sending a rocket to the moon	Raising a child
The recipe is essential	Rigid protocols or formulas are needed	Rigid protocols have a limited application or are counterproductive
Recipes are tested to ensure easy application	Sending one rocket to the moon increases the likelihood that the next rocket will be a success	Raising one child provides experience but is no guarantee of success with the next child
No particular experience is required, but experience increases the success rate	High levels of expertise and training in a variety of fields are necessary for success	Expertise helps but only when balanced with responsiveness to the particular child
A good recipe produces nearly the same cake every time	Key elements of each rocket must be identical to succeed	Every child is unique and must be understood as an individual
The best recipe gives good results every time	There is a high degree of certainty of outcome	Uncertainty of outcome remains
A good recipe notes the quantity and nature of the parts needed and specifies the order in which to combine them, but there is room for experimentation	Success depends on a blueprint that directs the development of separate parts and specifies the exact relationship in which to assemble those parts	The parts cannot be separated from the whole; essence exists in the relationship between different people, different experiences and different moments in time

Source: Westley et al, 2006, page 9.

Prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS inevitably encompass a combination of simple, complicated and complex problems, and a range of complementary methods is needed to evaluate such scenarios. Where we need to evaluate longer-term multilevel programmes aiming at social change, in the context of particular cultures, politics, institutional policies, organizations and other factors, a given intervention[2] will likely include both components that lend themselves to a linear theory or model of change and components that are more complex, dynamic and unpredictable.

2 UNAIDS (2010b) defines an intervention as a defined activity or set of activities designed to bring about a change in some aspect (e.g. morbidity, attitudes, behaviour) of a specific audience (e.g. adolescent girls) in a particular setting (e.g. urban secondary schools in South Africa).

Two contrasting examples are revealing. A BBC Trust-sponsored campaign to promote condom use in India illustrates a relatively simple theory of change that lies between Glouberman's "Simple" and "Complicated" columns in Table 1 (Westley et al., 2006, p.9).[3] A conventional monitoring and evaluation approach would probably seek to verify this assumption by measuring individual changes in audience knowledge, attitudes and practice, using a control group to enable attribution of observed changes to the campaign. A linear predictable trajectory of change is feasible, given the focus on individual-level outcomes.

In contrast, the approach of Nicaragua soap opera *Puntos de Encuentro* focuses explicitly on influencing the social context using a combination of media, edutainment programming, youth empowerment training, and fostering links and networks between existing organizations and movements to catalyse social change (Bradshaw et al., 2006). In Puntos' complexity-oriented approach, no single factor is perceived as being the cause of change. Instead, a systemic-oriented evaluator would consider the extent to which different factors have contributed to changes in social norms and created an enabling environment for healthier individual attitudes and actions (Lacayo et al., 2008).

An evolving theory of change

Many practitioners and theorists argue that dynamic social contexts demand a flexible or evolving theory of change, as Mowles and colleagues (2008) outline in the comparable context of complex community initiatives. Similarly, Eoyang & Berkas (1998) remind us that as understanding deepens and new questions come into sharper focus through the life of an initiative, theories of change themselves need to be refined and adapted.

Several approaches explored in Section 5 attempt to address the need for a dynamic theory or model. For example, whole systems action research makes use of evolving sets of activities and lines of enquiry that match the changing theory of change (Burns, 2007a). Perhaps a more relevant approach to diverse social change communication initiatives is not to present a causal model at all but rather "to articulate the common principles or rules that will be used to guide emergent and responsive strategy and action" (Rogers, 2008, p.42).[4]

3.3 The scope of social change communication evaluation for HIV programmes

The fundamentals of social change and issues of multiple causality discussed above call for approaches to social change communication programme evaluation that recognize that:

- social processes are key to effective responses to HIV and AIDS;
- human and social systems are highly complex, and we will never be able to fully grasp or predict their behaviour;
- social change processes precede and will long outlive artificially constructed and bounded "development" projects or programmes of limited duration and scope;
- particular programmes cannot be meaningfully evaluated in isolation from their wider contexts, including the sociocultural, political, economic and organizational environments within which they exist;

3 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/whatwedo/where/asia/india/2008/04/080806_india_gates_condomcondom_video.shtml.

4 See, for example, Eoyang & Berkas' (1998) work on complex adaptive systems and applications of social network analysis developed by Rick Davies (2003, 2009) (see Section 5).

- any knowledge is partial, and research and evaluation should be explicit about their objectives, values and methods, so that audiences know where their "findings" come from, who has legitimized those findings and on what basis;
- the boundaries of an enquiry are critical – what is in or left out, and why?;
- the perspectives and experiences of key development actors, in particular the intended beneficiaries, should be central in the evaluation of social change communication for HIV programmes;
- developmental learning-oriented evaluations can themselves reinforce processes of development and social change;
- development actors at every level have a role to play if the evaluation of social change communication is to become more effective and more meaningful.

These issues are not new, and many evaluators, development practitioners and analysts have already found effective ways to address the challenges of complex aspects of interventions in other fields. We consider related developments that hold promise for social change communication monitoring and evaluation when we look at innovative evaluation approaches in Section 5 and at elements of an overall evaluation framework in Section 6.

4. Strengthening and complementing indicators

The rationales for indicators, and the processes of their development, are critical considerations in social change contexts. In this section we pose questions that should be asked before particular indicators are selected, including how aspects not captured adequately by indicators can be better catered for.

Indicators or signs that indicate rather than prove something are not neutral but always reflect the prevailing state of knowledge and particular values and priorities. Leading evaluators usefully remind us of the partiality of indicators and the significance of where and from whom they stem (e.g. Greene, 1999, p.169). Therefore, to secure legitimacy for any indicator, transparency about how and by whom it has been developed is essential. The criteria that confer legitimacy among one set of stakeholders (e.g. national programme planners) may be different from the criteria of greatest importance to another set of stakeholders (e.g. members of the community where the endeavour will take place). Checking "expert indicators" – that is, indicators developed and validated by "experts" – with various stakeholder groups facilitates the uncovering of different perceptions and priorities. These perceptions can be weighed according to relative importance, in connection with selecting indicators (e.g. Davies, 2008).

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are often required by, and developed according to the expectations of, national programmes and other stakeholders. The frameworks often require use of standardized indicators to enhance comparability and cross-project learning. As a result, at the individual project level, indicators are typically imposed rather than negotiated with and developed by key stakeholders. This can fuel frustration and lack of care in data collection if people at the project level do not know or agree with their value. In contrast, dialogic ways of developing indicators that avert such negative responses are available.

Indicators can be useful in focusing and communicating stakeholders' specific interests and in stimulating mutual understanding. Examples from large complex natural resource programmes

show how indicators can become a common currency for different stakeholders to illustrate their priorities, and can foster mutual understanding and communication (Lee, in Ramírez, 2007, p.89).[5]

In complex evolving situations where social change and social change communication take place, tracking trends and processes of change is critical. Indicators can be developed to serve as markers of progress. Proximate and incremental indicators, or outcomes that an organization can expect to influence in a meaningful way, often focus on changes in conditions, attitudes, behaviours, relationships and the capabilities of individual actors, groups or institutions. They are incremental in that "achieving short term and intermediate outcomes can be shown to contribute to long term sustainable change" (Keystone Accountability, 2008, p.7). In line with systems thinking and complexity approaches, they demonstrate progress towards or contribution to social change, rather than seeking to identify direct casual links.

Our discussion of social change recognizes the importance of upstream social factors in creating enabling environments for ownership and action at local levels. It points to the need to move beyond HIV-specific indicators to ways of capturing broader social conditions or changes that underpin effective responses. Initiatives to develop "AIDS competence", for example, illustrate contrasting approaches that prioritize strengthening local capacity to act and adapt, to communicate with partners and other initiatives, and to identify common dimensions of capacity that may be useful for assessing social change (Campbell et al., 2007; UNAIDS & UNITAR, 2005). In Section 5 we discuss a range of approaches that complement indicators.

5. Innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluation

Following discussion above on what the characteristics of social change, social aspects of HIV and social change communication imply for evaluation, we turn now to relatively new ideas, largely neglected in the field of HIV and AIDS, which promise more relevant and useful frameworks to address issues of social change, and explore their potential for further development. We argue that complexity thinking and complexity-informed approaches go furthest in offering frameworks to capture the whole – the interconnectedness of living social change processes that are particularly relevant when considering the social aspects of HIV and AIDS. They also resonate with the learning orientation of participatory monitoring and evaluation and the need to engage multiple stakeholders and perspectives.

Notable literature and practice have embraced complex systems concepts for more than 30 years. Experience in systems and "soft systems" thinking, and its application to development evaluation, includes work on whole systems action research and complex adaptive systems. Each of these perspectives emphasizes the importance of local/insider participation, knowledge generation and learning and lends itself to participatory approaches.

We also consider the different strand of work using complex systems concepts – qualitative comparative analysis. Qualitative comparative analysis looks at the trajectory of social systems over the long term to identify particular social factors that may influence overall social outcomes and thus provide broad pointers for policy that can guide social change in directions of greater equity and better health outcomes. We briefly review related evaluation approaches and tools, including utilization-focused evaluation, social network analysis, outcome mapping and "most significant change".

5 For examples of creative and participatory processes of indicator development among Canadian aboriginals, see Ramírez & Richardson (2005).

5.1 Systems thinking and systemic perspectives

Systems thinking shares many fundamentals with participatory monitoring and evaluation and shares with complexity approaches a shift in focus to consider the bigger picture, interrelationships and processes. Boundaries and the values they reflect are central considerations: "Boundaries ... are judgments about worth. Defining boundaries is an essential part of systems work/inquiry/thinking" (Imam et al., 2007, p.6). As Imam et al emphasize, "Value is contained in the relevance of the inquiry to those affected by it... Stakeholders are not passive players or mere informants – they are actively engaged in the critique about boundaries" (Imam et al., 2007, p.8). For evaluation, this implies appreciating significant actors and factors in the wider beyond-project context, highlighting the challenge of attributing impact. Importantly, systemic thinking "highlights dynamics that are not always visible through the scrutiny of individual interactions. This is crucial because outcomes (positive or negative) will often have more to do with the interrelationship between interacting interventions than the effect of any individual action. Understanding the wider system within which these emerge is crucial because action rarely impacts in a linear way" (Burns, 2007b, p.182).

Thus, a systems-influenced evaluation foregrounds key evaluation questions (see Section 2). It exposes assumptions about what constitutes "valid knowledge". Key questions are: Whose reality is being considered? Who is defining the situation? How do you establish what is in or left out of the scope of work (i.e. which interrelationships are relevant)? How do you establish which standpoint to take (i.e. whose perspectives are relevant)? Who or what (ideas) benefit from these decisions, and who or what is disadvantaged by them?[6]

5.2 Complexity theory

Closely related to systems thinking, complexity theory has become influential in a wide range of disciplines in recent years (Byrne, 1998; Eve et al., 1998). In systems where there are extensive interactions and feedback between the constituent parts (a defining feature of social life), complexity theory highlights the inadequacy of linear models of causality in predicting outcomes. Complexity theory shows that interactions in the system give rise to emergent properties that are qualitatively different from the character of the constituents of the system themselves. Complexity thinking suggests that societies can be understood as complex systems and subsystems that interact with each other. A defining characteristic is overriding concern with social processes rather than social structures (Fowler, 2008).

5.3 What do systems and complex systems approaches imply for evaluation?

Recognizing that social life exhibits characteristics of a complex system has implications for understanding and evaluating social change:

- Social change is often emergent and difficult to predict in advance, as it is dependent on the dynamics of interdependent and interacting processes. This implies a shift from relying on certainties to estimating probabilities.
- The causal pathways of social change and impact trajectories of interventions aimed at social factors are not linear but are complex and contingent. They require different approaches and expectations of the scope of evaluation.

6 (Williams undated)

- Qualitative changes in social life may result from apparently small changes in aspects of the society, which combine and feed back to produce bigger changes overall (the famous "butterfly effect" or "tipping point"). This is crucial for evaluations in complex systems of governance (Burns, 2007b).
- Knowledge of the system is inevitably local and provisional, and the whole system is literally unknowable. This does not, however, prevent purposeful action at local levels (Byrne, 2002).
- All knowledge is inevitably partial. Researchers and evaluators should be transparent about where particular knowledge and findings come from, and the basis of their legitimacy.
- Context-specific approaches imply regularly revisiting underlying theories of change, which themselves need to be adapted as social context changes.
- The significance of how boundaries of an intervention or system are defined will have implications for the kinds of change considered important and what is tracked. Expanding the boundaries of an enquiry may change who is legitimately considered a decision-maker, who has valid knowledge, and who has a stake in the results. In this way, boundary adjustment can bring in a broader array of relevant perspectives (Midgley, 2007).
- Triangulation of methods and perspectives helps to achieve a fuller understanding of social change.

Many of the challenges of evaluating social change in the context of HIV resonate with systems approaches. Below we introduce some specific applications of systems and complexity approaches.

Whole systems action research

There is a rich relevant literature and practice in the fields of action research and participatory action research. We highlight one example, whole systems action research (Burns, 2007a), which synthesizes insights from complex systems approaches and provides a practical way to address complex social issues. The approach facilitates community involvement in wider learning and change processes to inform policy in a bottom-up manner. Whole systems action research has framed large-scale evaluations in complex social and community contexts.

Whole systems action research combines parallel research and insight-generating processes with periodically bringing together all stakeholders in "large events" to review emerging data and identify systemic issues that "resonate" across the system. As significant issues are identified, they are addressed through exploratory action by groups of stakeholders directly involved with the issue. Subsequently, reflection and learning from these actions are fed back for review by wider stakeholder groups, in ongoing cycles of action and reflection. This approach has been shown to be effective at unlocking complex social issues and systemic factors that are often missed and that defy easy resolution (Burns, 2007a, Chapter 2).

Beginning with locally grounded enquiry processes rather than preconceptions about "problems", and recognizing that understanding of issues will evolve over time and that boundaries of a system initially deemed relevant may also change, whole systems action research attends to the systemic nature of problems (Burns, 2007a). Like complex adaptive systems, which we describe below, whole systems action research uses a flexible and emergent design whereby the evaluation design matches the emergent nature of the reality it seeks to evaluate.

Whole systems action research holds great learning potential for large numbers of participants, as in the evaluation of the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme (2003–2006).

This £83 million initiative, conceived over 10–15 years, supported 142 neighbourhoods and various grant recipients. The action research process became a hub through which learning about the complex multi-stakeholder and multi-community interventions was analysed and acted upon. Insights from the ground were linked to core decision-making processes and, through ongoing adaptation facilitated by the action research, substantial changes were implemented within 3 years. The evaluation design was intentionally emergent: "It was only having gone through a process of inquiry ... that we knew exactly what outcomes we were trying to evaluate. And as these things became clearer, so the design of the evaluation evolved, resulting in for example, the creation of participatory processes to establish intermediate outcomes upon which the programme could be assessed after five years" (Burns, 2007b, p.191).

Insights from complex adaptive systems

Another strand of work that draws on systems approaches and complexity insights is complex adaptive systems. The valuable insights of Eoyang and Berkas, widely respected as leaders in this field, are very relevant to contexts of social change:

"As CASs [complex adaptive systems], human systems are dynamic, entangled, scale-independent, transformative and emergent. These characteristics challenge the basic assumptions of traditional evaluation methods. They necessitate new evaluation approaches that are as rich and varied as the human systems they are designed to assess" (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998, p.9).

Qualitative comparative analysis: Understanding complex cases

A different application of complexity theory takes a more macro-view of the social factors that influence the overall character of particular societies. Qualitative comparative analysis uses social and behavioural survey data to examine trends over time and to identify key social parameters that impact on the broad emergent character of social outcomes of a society over time (Byrne, 2002). Variants of the approach have been used to examine epidemics of tuberculosis (TB) (Byrne, 1998), social exclusion (Byrne, 2005), and housing and deprivation in European contexts (Blackman, 2006). To date, the methods have not been applied to HIV trends,[7] but there is great potential to identify policy insights and data-relevant conclusions for action on a range of wider social determinants of health and social drivers of HIV, making use of widely available surveillance data. This could valuably complement the existing modelling of epidemiological and behavioural surveys that have been used to evaluate large HIV and AIDS programmes.

Proponents of this method are careful to stress that the social factors identified in qualitative comparative analysis are not determining; nor do they have easily predictable causal influence on social outcomes overall, since interaction with other factors and the wider context is constant (Byrne, 2002). The method does, however, provide pointers to broad social policies that can be seen to put limits on, and to influence the character of, social change. In this vein, efforts may have to focus on providing basic social infrastructure of health, well-being and social capabilities, in order to nurture an enabling environment in which local action and initiative can flourish (Vincent, 2009).

7 Although a South African PhD thesis by Owen Banda compared the AIDS responses of Brazil and South Africa using adapted qualitative comparative analysis methods.

Addressing the importance of relationships and networks

Several useful approaches and methodologies that draw loosely on insights from complex systems thinking pay particular attention to networks and relationships in development, and their significance to the evaluation of social change.

The importance of networks and relationships in development is increasingly recognized. This is occurring within the context of growing interest in the dynamics of contemporary globalization and the "Network Society", which recognizes that much change and innovation happen through networks, often in an emergent, non-planned way (Castells, 1997). It is a broad concept with extensive application.

Davies argues that attending to networks of relationships and how these change over the course of an initiative is a more relevant and tangible way of capturing influence and change than the more "abstract and disembodied processes of change" reflected in particular language and the logic of the logical framework approach (Davies, 2003, p.2). Network perspectives are better able to capture multidirectional and reciprocal influences and causality that are typical to development initiatives: "Removing the one-directional nature of change leads us from thinking about a chain of events to a network of events, and from a chain of actors to a network of actors. Networks are found on all scales, within and between organizations, and can be formal and informal, visible and less so" (Davies & Dart, 2005, p.134).

The strengths of network perspectives include providing a broad and inclusive framework; they can be described and analysed at many scales; and a range of valuable tools and an extensive and developing body of relevant theory and research exist to describe and measure networks (Davies & Dart, 2005).

By making visible patterns of connections between stakeholders and showing how these change over time, network approaches hold the potential to show, literally, lines of influence and power between groups and individuals. Where issues of rights, empowerment, diversity of participation and involvement of the people most affected are critical, analysing the shape and density of social networks enables the assessment of related claims and their realization over time. Thus, network approaches provide a useful tool for attending to shifting power and relationships, something critical to social change and social change communication. Davies' (2009) paper explores the potential uses, methods and tools of relevance from the field of social network analysis and other related perspectives.

Outcome mapping

One approach that makes particular use of the network lens, now adopted by many development practitioners, is outcome mapping. Outcome mapping stems from a critique of linear explanations of systemic phenomena. In line with systems thinking, outcome mapping explicitly recognizes that a programme does not operate in isolation from wider external factors and therefore cannot plan or evaluate as though it did. In outcome mapping it is appreciated that development "impacts" typically result from "a confluence of events for which no single agency or group can realistically claim full credit" (Earl et al., 2001, p.xi). Monitoring and evaluation in outcome mapping are focused around "boundary partners" – that is, the individuals, groups and organizations with whom the programme interacts directly. The originality of the methodology lies in "its shift away from assessing the products of a program (e.g. policy relevance, poverty alleviation, reduced conflict) to focus on changes in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people

and organizations with whom a development program works directly" (Earl & Carden, 2002, p.520). These outcomes enhance the possibility of development impacts, but it is not a relationship of direct cause and effect.

Reflecting a more realistic and humble approach to evaluation, outcome mapping seeks to understand an organization's impact within its broader context and to explicitly recognize the significant contributions of multiple actors to large-scale and long-term change processes. The strengths of outcome mapping make it "well suited to the complex functioning and long-term aspects of international development programs where outcomes are intermeshed and cannot be easily or usefully separated from each other". Importantly, the methodology "facilitates standardizations of indicators without losing the richness of each case's story". Outcome mapping is at root a participatory process "premised on the belief that those engaged in the programme can benefit from working as a group to systematically collect, analyse and interpret data". Initially developed by the International Development Research Centre, Canada, outcome mapping is supported by considerable high-quality and easily accessed resources and an online forum (Earl & Carden, 2002, p.520; Website, http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation).

The network-based approaches described above provide contrasting ways of representing change processes, from linear models to more social and networked "maps". They stem from different assumptions about what is significant and feasible in terms of impact, and highlight the relevance of underlying theories of change.

5.4 Other approaches

Story-based approaches: The "most significant change"

The best-known story-based approach is the "most significant change" methodology, which attracts notable international interest. The essence of this methodology is enabling key stakeholders to tell and select their own stories of change in order to demonstrate impact. Transparency about why particular stories are selected is fostered through discussion between key stakeholders. The "most significant change" approach thereby helps to surface the assumptions and values of different stakeholder groups, fostering understanding and mutual learning in the process. It intentionally prioritizes organizational learning. In its relative infancy, the approach appeals to practitioners keen to prioritize less-heard voices (Davies & Dart, 2005).

A rare, published account of the "most significant change" approach in the context of evaluating an HIV and AIDS programme in India, highlights how the approach can catalyze critical learning and programme improvement:

MSC ["most significant change"] is best used to understand the unexpected outcomes as it is not based on indicators. Conventional quantitative monitoring of predetermined indicators ... does not drive us to explore beyond what is obvious – the indefinable, subtle and indirect consequences of our work. By getting this information on a regular basis, and taking time to reflect on what this means, organisations can adjust and modify their direction of effort so that they achieve more of the outcomes they value... [The MSC approach] emphasises story-telling as a form of participatory monitoring, unique in its ability to capture direct views of communities, including unexpected and evolving outcomes. It is also unique in presenting a methodical, systematic way of collecting and analysing individual stories and selecting the most compelling ones (India HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2010, p.15).

Community AIDS competence and community capacity

AIDS competence and community capacity approaches focus on developing key domains of capacity that may also be important dimensions for assessing social change (Campbell et al., 2007; UNAIDS, 2005). Like outcome mapping and "most significant change", community AIDS competence, or Community Life Competence approaches involve a process of community dialogue and self-assessment of strengths and needs in responding to HIV and AIDS. The "SALT" methods of Community Life Competence[8] apply an appreciative philosophy and stimulates communities to articulate a vision or "dream" of the outcome they would like for themselves. Coaches assist community members to plan actions that they can take to achieve that vision, building on their strengths. They build understanding of wider social change needs and address wider sectoral development needs, mirroring the principles of social change communication. In the interest of creating contexts conducive to effective management of HIV and AIDS, Campbell and colleagues (2007) outline six strategies to foster "HIV-competent" communities: (1) building knowledge and basic skills; (2) creating social spaces for dialogue and critical thinking; (3) promoting a sense of local ownership of the problem and incentives for action; (4) emphasizing community strengths and resources; (5) mobilizing existing formal and informal local networks; and (6) building partnerships between marginalized communities and more powerful outside actors and agencies, locally, nationally and internationally. These resonate significantly with the fundamentals of social change communication.

We have shown how insights from complexity and systems thinking, reflected in related tools and approaches, can strengthen evaluation in ways that foster learning and positive change. They befit situations where direct attribution is neither possible nor appropriate, and instead focus on relationships and broad social factors that can be important enabling or inhibiting factors in relation to social change and development processes. In Section 6 we consider broad elements of an evaluation framework that draw on these insights and worldviews.

6. Towards an evaluation framework

The combined challenges of addressing social complexity and involving people most affected by HIV in their own social change have led participatory evaluation scholars and practitioners to the range of approaches highlighted above. Our focus has been the complicated and complex dimensions of social change and social change communication, as there has been a deficit of attention to these in the HIV literature. In the context of HIV, evaluation practice based on linear attribution is most applicable to clinical- and individual-focused interventions where causality is direct and interventions are short-term and relatively replicable (Bartos, 2009). We advocate methodologies and methods to complement, rather than replace, current practice.

With emphasis on reflecting core programme values, learning, adaptation and responsiveness to dynamic contexts, one particular evaluation framework for social change communication is not feasible. It is possible, however, to identify core elements of a framework, as we do below.

Given the interactions between multiple factors that influence HIV risk and vulnerability in each setting, and the changing dynamic of interactions over time, it is not feasible to firmly design a

8 "SALT" stands for Stimulate and support; Appreciate; Listen, learn and link; and Transfer – four of the five steps in the Community Life Competence methodology. See http://www.communitylifecompetence.org/en/pages/8-community-life-competence-process.

social change communication intervention in advance. We have argued that any theory of change should evolve as a project develops and as ongoing enquiry reveals a clearer picture of which factors are important and how programmes need to adapt accordingly.

The approaches outlined in this paper pay explicit attention to multiple perspectives, power relations and the need to involve people in assessing their own change. Network evaluation perspectives pay closer attention to the character of social networks and relationships. A common strength of approaches reviewed is their ability to deal with unexpected and emergent outcomes that typify social change processes. The "most significant change" story-based approach is most explicit about the use of narrative accounts of social situations or events, but many systems and action research approaches value stories for their strength in conveying rich detail in appealing and accessible ways.

Finally, the approaches that we explore highlight the significance of external factors and contexts that influence a particular intervention that is the focus of evaluation. The socially constructed nature of boundaries – defining what to consider and what to exclude from an analysis -- is a key insight from systems approaches and network perspectives, highlighting the significance of wider context. This is pertinent to the evaluation of interventions aimed at the social drivers of HIV.

6.1 Rethinking evaluation frameworks: Towards better practice

The ultimate value of any evaluation depends on how it is used (Patton, 1997). This widely cited view highlights the need to foster environments that are conducive to evaluation use (see Box 2). Keeping the processes of critical reflection, learning and feedback alive and relevant is more important than being seduced by an apparent sense of control that particular planning tools might offer. Consequently, the following stages can guide evaluation processes:

1. Involve all primary stakeholders in identifying key evaluation questions that are explicitly informed by the evaluation's aims. Take heed of the phrase "better an approximate answer to the right question, than an exact answer to the wrong question."
2. Consider your key evaluation questions in relation to the notions of simple, complicated and complex dimensions. Be clear about where linear cause–effect thinking and evaluation are and are not appropriate.
3. Revisit current evaluation practice in view of the above. How might you better assess and capture important, more complex aspects of social change? How could approaches advocated here complement current practice?
4. Use stories from practice to interrogate your emerging framework. For example, what do the intended beneficiaries feel are the greatest achievements? Will the proposed framework capture these developments? This might require revising initial evaluation questions, developing new evaluation questions and reconsidering methods.
5. For interventions aimed at social change, in addition to assessing changes at the levels the intervention has targeted (e.g. individual knowledge and attitudes; community norms), there is a need to make explicit the influence of wider social factors. This could involve a combination of the following:

- Articulate a more comprehensive theory of change. Identify influential structural factors and their likely causal pathways.
- Document over time the implementation of interventions, including details about context and how the intervention works for particular groups, using routine monitoring and qualitative studies.
- Use biobehavioural survey data over time to track the influence of salient social and structural factors, as in qualitative comparative analysis (Byrne, 2002).
- Use whole systems action research to explore key social drivers in context (Burns, 2007a).
- Learn from community competence initiatives (see http://www.communitylifecompetence.org).

In addition, much could be gained through collaborations and efforts to balance a focus on assessing changes at the level at which the intervention is targeted, with monitoring other structural factors for their possible effects and interactions with the intervention. In the national or subnational context, it might be useful to have a body responsible for gathering existing research findings across the range of social and structural factors that impact on risk and vulnerability. Such an observatory of social determinants of health could usefully contribute to the evaluation work of national AIDS programmes (UNAIDS, 2010c). If updated regularly, such a profile could assist programme managers to contextualize their management of interventions.

Box 2: Critical considerations when seeking to strengthen the evaluation of social change communication

- How will you secure essential support and resources, and ensure that these will be sustained over time?
- What are the implications for different stakeholders, including senior management?
- What existing mechanisms could be used to share experience and learning, both internally and externally? What other mechanisms need to be developed to effectively capture, share and communicate learning with diverse audiences?
- How can you ensure that learning from evaluation experience, including from riskier endeavours and weaknesses, is used to inform and strengthen practice?

6.2 Useful frameworks and guides

We highlight below some valuable readily available guides and frameworks for the evaluation of social change. They all emphasize the meaningful involvement of key stakeholders in codetermining assessment processes and procedures, based on a solid grounding in local context and on the guiding values and core principles of social change communication.

The **utilization-focused evaluation framework** fosters the use of evaluation findings and learning through the process. Patton's (1997) widely applied guide remains a key source. Although the original book breaks the process into 12 steps, Patton & Horton (2009) have more recently summarized the framework in five stages.

The strengths of utilization-focused evaluation include its explicit focus on use ("intended use by intended users"), process (how, and who are involved) and capacity development, reflecting a developmental and participatory approach to evaluation.

The CFSC Consortium's series of complementary **participatory monitoring and evaluation** guides for social change communication contexts continues to inform related work.[9] Produced in varying degrees of detail for different audiences, these publications share the ethos and broad stages of utilization-focused evaluation. The guides describe a "spiral of key learning moments" across the six core stages that participatory monitoring and evaluation processes entail.

Strengths include explicit attention to who is involved, how and why (which voices? Whose priorities? Whose values? For whom?), who determines key evaluation questions, facilitating learning and change through evaluation processes, and fostering the use of findings. A dialogic approach that prioritizes learning is advocated. Parks and colleagues (2005) include considerable detail about different aspects of participatory monitoring and evaluation, including potential tools.[10]

The user-friendly tool produced by Keystone Accountability (2008) guides organizations through **impact planning and learning** in ways that are sensitive to the complexity of social change processes and complex systems. It helps organizations develop a shared vision of success and a theory of change (or "pathways to outcomes") and considers what makes for effective collaboration and partnership. It suggests complementary ways of gathering evidence of change, including dialogue, personal stories and journals. It focuses on significant changes and reflection on why they have occurred, in a similar vein to the "most significant change" approach.

The user-friendly practical guide from Kusters and colleagues (2011) outlines ways of **making evaluations more useful** in the international development sector. Based on a participatory approach, the guide illustrates how core evaluation principles can be translated into action. It discusses key concepts and suggests ways of ensuring that evaluations foster learning among stakeholders.

Developed through a consultative process with potential users, the International Fund for Agricultural Development's **comprehensive guide on project monitoring and evaluation** is widely relevant and adaptable (Guijt & Woodhill, 2002).

All of the above are keen not to increase the burden on programme staff but rather to better use existing and potential opportunities for critical reflection, evaluation, learning and improved practice. With an applied focus, they aim to help make evaluations more meaningful, more useful and better used. They are widely relevant to social change processes, including social change communication.

9 See http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/who_measures_change.pdf.

10 For examples of participatory and learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation in practice, in diverse contexts, see Estrella et al.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This discussion paper has explored a range of innovative and less-used approaches that hold promise for more effectively assessing the social dimensions of HIV. We have highlighted the need to appreciate that social change processes inevitably encompass multiple and at times conflicting perspectives and voices.

We have argued that learning and "learning how to think evaluatively" (Patton, 1998), should lie at the heart of evaluation for social change, as exemplified in participatory approaches and "process use" (Midgley, 2007; Patton, 1998). By facilitating critical reflection and learning, the evaluation of social change should reaffirm and be an integral part of social change processes themselves.

We have highlighted strengths of selected approaches, including their appreciation of development as complex, emergent and transformative, which constitute positive alternatives to ideas of measurement based on prediction and control of variation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, systemic perspectives and complexity thinking all have much to offer, as do the practical approaches reviewed that draw on their conceptual frameworks. Overall we echo calls for greater creativity, risk-taking and innovation in evaluation.

The confluence of participatory monitoring and evaluation with insights from systems and complexity approaches reinforces human rights principles, including key actor participation. These core values, shared by UNAIDS and many organizations engaged in HIV and AIDS responses, need to be reflected in evaluation processes. Implications include the need to let go of the notion of "best practice" and instead consider diverse and contextualized "better practice". Instead of seeking consensus on one overarching monitoring and evaluation framework, we need to seed and catalyse parallel and complementary evaluation approaches, in recognition of the value of methodological pluralism and complementarity (Guijt, 2007; Midgley, 2007). That is, different approaches are needed for different purposes and contexts.

How do we nurture such shifts in thinking and practice? We need to reward innovation, (informed) risk-taking and creativity in evaluation practice (Mowles et al., 2008). Appropriate expectations, timeframes and resources are fundamental. Clarity about where direct cause–effect (linear mode) thinking and methods are and are not appropriate is essential. It is important to gather a wide range of evidence through diverse methods, emphasizing appropriateness to context over illusions of perfection; something less than "ideal" should not necessarily be considered less rigorous (Woolcock, 2009, p.8).

There is a need to reconsider assumptions about scale-up and replicability when contextual factors are so critical (Callaghan, 2008). Instead, the focus shifts to learning from broadly comparable contexts, and adapting and applying learning, rather than replication. Notions of scaling across and resonance appear more appropriate (Burns, 2007a).

Our recommendations broadly echo those of an expert group that has considered the challenges of assessing social change in depth, including the need to communicate with donors about the bases of assessment and learning processes (Guijt, 2007). Their highly relevant conclusions are drawn on below.

7.1 Recommendations

We support calls for greater modesty and realism about attributing impact to any one particular initiative in the domain of social change. Rather than insisting on overly complex models, a few simple rules that provide clear direction, accompanied by basic guidelines that allow maximum freedom for people to find their own ways of achieving aims, can be productive (Lacayo et al., 2008). We are cautioned against overprescription that stifles creativity and innovation (Lacayo et al., 2008; Sibthorpe et al., 2004, cited in Rogers, 2008, p.43) and against inappropriate evaluation "super models" (Midgley, 2007, p.19).

Appreciating this, the following recommendations will strengthen the evaluation of social change communication:

- Evaluation approaches should be consistent with the underlying values and principles of an initiative. Complex, emergent programmes and process require complex and evolutionary evaluation designs.
- The intended use and users of evaluation should be kept to the fore (Patton, 1997, 2002). This highlights issues of equity (who participates and why?), multiple actors, values, principles and perspectives. People affected by HIV should remain central to key decisions about evaluation purpose and questions (UNAIDS, 2007b). Focusing on use emphasizes the importance of flexibility and responsiveness.
- Social complexity may demand evaluation based on a dynamic theory of change tracked as part of the ongoing evaluation. Responsiveness, adaptation and ongoing engagement with social issues at hand are emphasized over prediction and control. Project plans and evaluations should be considered works in progress (Reeler, 2007).
- Multiple perspectives and lived experiences of social challenges such as stigma, gender inequity and rights issues must be considered alongside existing local studies and national research, in order to build a holistic picture of the key social drivers in particular contexts. Evaluations should facilitate this.
- It is important to ensure that diverse means are used to share critical issues, challenges and ideas with different stakeholder groups (Keystone Accountability, 2008). Participatory communication drawing on video, drama and culturally grounded expression of issues can significantly strengthen traditional research and "evidence".
- Better documentation of existing innovations and novel approaches to evaluation in contexts of social change programming should be supported. Much of the existing innovation underway remains unknown, and thus opportunities for additional learning are missed.
- It is important to invest in and trust local experts and local processes, including "champions" who commit to the approaches included in this paper for the long term. High staff turnover affects both social change processes and their evaluation, with significant negative impacts on institutional learning and capacity (Guijt, 2007).

Attention should be paid to the unexpected and to "seeking surprise" (Guijt, 2008b).

Significant questions need to be asked of current evaluation practice and the values and voices that inform it, reflecting on the underlying principles and key evaluation questions. The factors that inform evaluation choices from design onwards should be considered. Which aspects of social change communication are and are not effectively captured in current evaluation practice?

What other approaches and methods could complement those currently used? Consider whose voices are being heard and whose are neglected. Are formal and informal reflection and learning processes taken into account? How are findings and learning documented and shared? How are risk-taking and innovation rewarded or inhibited? Is there a balance between local perspectives and outsider insights?

7.2 Longer-term recommendations for particular stakeholder groups

Donors

Donors, themselves part of complex webs of accountability (Eyben, 2006; Picciotto, 2007), are called to "rethink the principles on which they base their models of evaluation and learning" to ensure greater consistency between espoused values and the approaches they use (Guijt, 2007, p.52). Changes supportive of a social change agenda outlined by the Assessing Social Change group are relevant:

- Create a realistic perspective on what types of change can occur in specified time periods.
- Ensure longer-term funding in order to impact on social change.
- Recognize that building consensus is essential to overall buy-in of an initiative and its results, particularly when developing common outcomes among multiple grantees.
- Ensure a learning orientation rooted in sustained relationships, to create shared understandings of strategy, results and opportunities.
- Create opportunities to hear the stories and voices of poor people.
- Foster flexibility, learning and sustainability by supporting longer-term development and evaluation processes.
- Encourage active participation of donors in evaluation design processes.
- Appreciate that measuring social change requires long-term commitment on all sides.
- Fund innovation and supporting risk-taking, without guarantees (Guijt, 2007).
- Fund further methodological and conceptual development of approaches that can evaluate complex social change.

Intermediaries and evaluation facilitators

- Ensure an effective strategy and conceptual clarity.
- Foster a questioning approach rather than recommending and advising.
- Balance locally driven assessment with outsider insights.
- Create safe spaces for honest reflection and learning.
- Managers and policy makers need to consider how to create and nurture organizational cultures that foster, rather than inhibit, meaningful participation in evaluation processes.

UNAIDS

- Continue to actively promote diversity of approaches and methods to evaluation (e.g. UNAIDS, 2009b) and seed innovation.
- Support further methodological and conceptual development of approaches able to evaluate complex social change.
- Support sustained capacity development in "alternative" or complementary monitoring and evaluation principles and practice.
- In addition to formal evaluations, recognize the value of supporting champions and initiatives longer term, beyond the lives of particular projects.
- Support the gathering of case studies and inspiring examples of HIV initiatives that address social drivers.
- Support peer learning and dialogue among those working innovatively to evaluate social change, so that innovation pilots feel part of a larger movement.

7.3 Further research

Further research is needed in the following areas:

- Build on the learning from existing HIV initiatives that have attempted to address social dimensions of HIV, such as gender inequity, stigma and discrimination.
- Share innovations that deal with complex scenarios and problems, including ideas, tools, games and stories.
- Gather diverse logic models (theories of change or programme impact pathways') for social change communication initiatives to show different causal paths in different contexts.
- Identify and signpost sound evaluation-related and HIV/AIDS resources and guides relevant to evaluating social change programmes.
- Better document and share innovations in the evaluation of social change and social change communication, particularly in the context of HIV and AIDS.
- Gather and creatively use diverse stories of change.

We need to be honest about the complexity and scale of the challenge of evaluating social change communication programmes. Demonstrating the impact of social change or social change communication processes will never be quick or simple (Guijt, 2007). Numerous examples illustrate how small and diverse actions and shifts, over time, help social movements to reach a critical tipping point. The same could become true of evaluation thinking and practice, and we need to strengthen alliances, support diverse initiatives, and share innovations and learning in this interest.

We have seen how a multitude of diverse but complementary initiatives and actions typically underlie "tipping points". It is important to catalyse shifts in positive directions, using systematic insights and available methodological resources (Midgley, 2007), in a spirit of creativity, innovation and learning (Oral History Project Team, 2007).

Subsequent stages of the research and learning process that has inspired this paper will likely include the piloting approaches explored here, bringing together stakeholders in national contexts

to review the evidence on social drivers, and using systemic action research to identify high-priority issues and to promote diverse lines of action and innovation (Burns, 2007a). As Picciotto (2007, p.520) notes: "A new paradigm has transformed the evaluation environment and raised the bar for the fledgling development evaluation profession. In the new century, development evaluation will have to be transformed and liberated from its current strictures to reach beyond aid, beyond projects, and beyond top-down approaches. It should be more comprehensive, more participatory, and better adapted to the felt needs of society".

We hope the approaches advocated in this paper will make evaluations more worthy of the social change communication processes of which they are a part and, ultimately, make service providers better able to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Further reading

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