



ASSESSING AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S IMPACT

UNDERSTANDING 'IMPACT'

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND IMPACT?

Understanding Amnesty International's impact on the world helps us improve the choices we make as an organization. It also means we are accountable to the people and organizations we work with in a real and meaningful way. This includes people who are at risk of human rights abuses, our partners, donors and supporters, and the human rights movement as a whole.

There are several reasons why it is vital to understand the impact we are having. These include:

LEARNING

Understanding impact helps us to learn and fine-tune our work. It is not just about proving that our work is effective. It is also about improving it. Lessons learned from impact evaluations can be used to modify our work on a specific campaign or project, such as changing the way we engage with the media or modifying our messages to governments. Impact assessments also give us broader, cumulative knowledge about what does and doesn't work – for example, what makes a particular campaigning method effective – which in turn helps us build more successful strategies in the future.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Impact assessment makes our commitments to accountability real. By understanding our impact we are proactively accountable instead of being held to account. Accountability means being able to explain how and why our work to uphold human rights is effective. Having inclusive planning and evaluation processes improves our accountability. Impact assessments are central to our accountability and a good source of information about our achievements, successes and challenges.

TRANSPARENCY

As a global organization with a high public profile, we need to be open and transparent about the quality of our work. Transparency is also a good way of sharing lessons learned about how to achieve change and further the human rights agenda.

DEFINING IMPACT AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impact is about the changes that result from an organization's work in the external world. These changes may be cumulative, planned or unintended. To qualify as 'impact', a given change must be significant in a particular context.

Within Amnesty International, impact is defined as any significant change – positive or negative, expected or not – that result from our direct intervention or contribution to improving a human rights situation.

Impact assessment helps us make informed judgements about the significance of any changes occurring as a result of our work. Understanding and measuring change should be part of any on-going monitoring at the project, programme or campaign levels.

Impact can occur at different stages of the project. Impact assessment should therefore not be limited to judging past performance. We should use them as a tool for continually checking that the changes occurring are those we set out to achieve.

Impact assessment can take place at any time. It can be done before starting a project, to assess the need for, and risks of, an intervention. It can be done during project implementation to monitor our work and adjust our plans if needed. Impact can also be assessed after a project or campaign has finished.

There is no need to wait – indications of change can emerge at any time. They inform our plans for what needs to be done next, and help make our work sustainable.

Impact assessment vs. evaluation

Impact assessments and evaluations are similar, but not all evaluations will look at impact. Some evaluations simply look at how well a system has been deployed, or to what extent a project has achieved what it set out to do.

Impact assessments look at the overall effects of a particular body of work, including positive and negative, intended and unexpected effects.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE

Our impact assessment work is guided by the following principles:

IMPACT ASSESSMENT IS AN ONGOING PROCESS

It can assist decision-making processes at all levels and at any time. It is important to do an assessment at the planning level, before a project starts. One approach is to check and improve the project by sharing your plans with key people involved, including partners and people whose lives will be affected. During implementation, or at the end of the project, look at your original plans and compare them with what actually happened. This will provide useful lessons. Our understanding of how change happens in a particular context - the change model - is not constant and needs to be adapted in the light of lessons learned from evaluations.

ASSESSING IMPACT IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE PROCESS OF CHANGE

It's not just about what has changed – the results – but about how and why. Everyone involved in the change process can acquire new skills, knowledge and perspectives. The more participatory the assessment is, the more meaningful and relevant its results will be. Participation will also ensure that impact assessment becomes an empowering learning process for all those involved.

MEASURING WHAT KIND OF CONTRIBUTION AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAS MADE

Social change can take place due to a myriad of factors and actors. Amnesty International increasingly works in partnership with other organizations and individuals. This highlights the need to measure our contribution to a situation, rather than attributing a particular change to the organization.

GOOD PRACTICE

Impact assessment requires effective and rigorous processes, and should also meet the highest human rights standards. The following points have been identified as good practice, internally as well as in other organizations and disciplines:

■ Inclusion and participation

Involve stakeholders at every stage of your project design, from situation analysis to setting indicators or reporting on final findings. For example, local focus groups can add valuable insights to a situation analysis, ensuring that we have properly understood the issues from their perspective. This could help with risk assessment too, as those facing human rights abuses are usually the most familiar with violators' methods. They can also help us to avoid plans that could put local people at risk. Finally, present and discuss evaluation findings with your stakeholders. This helps communicate concrete lessons based on multiple aspects of a project.

■ Rigorous methodology

All evaluations and impact assessment findings should be based on systematic evidence and data analysis. Data needs to be validated using multiple information sources, methods and/or informants. The size and composition of your sample also needs to be appropriate for your project. For large evaluations, use common indicators throughout in order to allow for data analysis and identifying trends. We encourage using multidisciplinary approaches to evaluation in order to address the complexity of Amnesty International's work.

■ Include a gender perspective

This might mean, for example, planning separate focus groups for women and men in order to allow women to participate freely. Carefully consider if and how women might be prevented from participating in an evaluation or planning activities. For data collection, always ensure that your statistics – such as the number of people attending a clinic or children at a school – are disaggregated by gender. At each stage of an evaluation, it is important to ask whether a change has been the same for women and men.

■ Ethics and integrity

Always ensure that personal and sensitive information is responsibly handled during an evaluation process. Give individuals the option of anonymity and confidentiality when collecting data from them. Clearly state how the information will be used. Always respect the dignity and wishes of those interviewed. Only use data recording equipment, such as audio recorders, after getting the interviewee's consent. Personal security is paramount, so always address all safety concerns.

■ Adopt a constructive approach towards learning and accountability

Evaluation findings need to be disseminated widely and ensured that the lessons are incorporated to improve future actions. Evaluations of large-scale programmes or campaigns should be made public, followed by a response prepared by management.