

Reflections on contribution analysis

Introduction

In 2023, the PGA team piloted contribution analysis as a new approach to evaluation of Sightsavers' achievements in policy and advocacy. The purpose of the exercise was to assess the extent to which contribution analysis may be a useful approach to evaluate policy and advocacy in future. This short piece provides an overview of contribution analysis as an approach, and a reflection on how it can be used going forward following the experience of the pilot. [Read the full contribution analysis piece](#)

Rationale for the pilot

From 2017-2022, Sightsavers implemented a programme to provide eye care, eliminate neglected tropical diseases, deliver inclusive education, and promote social inclusion in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Cameroon. The programme was funded by Irish Aid, with a total budget of €12.7 million over six years. Within each project, one component of the activities and budget was focused on policy and advocacy, with specific objectives to influence the governments in each of the countries to promote disability inclusion relating to eye health, NTDs, inclusive education and political participation.

An external end-term evaluation was completed in 2021, assessing the impact and effectiveness of the interventions, and evaluating the extent to which the projects met their objectives. While the end-term evaluation report provided many useful insights and recommendations, it had a number of limitations in terms of its focus on advocacy:

- The evaluation approach, in which progress is assessed against objectives set at the start of the project, is not well-suited to policy and advocacy work. One of the key successes of the project in terms of advocacy, the development of the eye health policy in Sierra Leone, was not among the original project objectives.
- The structure of the report follows the OECD DAC criteria rather than being sequenced by project or thematic area. As a result, there is no advocacy section, and the evaluation of the advocacy components of the projects are separated and truncated across multiple sections. The new electoral code for Senegal is covered on pages 61, 77, 78, 79 and 86, making it difficult for the reader to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how this was achieved and its overall significance for beneficiaries. Similarly, the development of the eye health policy in Sierra Leone is mentioned on pages 29, 55 and 81, as a result of which there is some duplication, no cohesive analysis and no detailed analysis of how this was achieved.
- The end-term evaluation was conducted in 2021, although Irish Aid PGII continued until December 2022, with the no-cost extension, to provide time to catch up following the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this, some of the findings of the evaluation are not fully up to date as they do not reflect further achievements which were delivered in 2022.

- The report focused almost solely on Sightsavers' role in the projects. In the case of policy and advocacy, change is delivered through long term engagement by multiple governmental and non-state actors, and it is not realistic to expect an NGO such as Sightsavers to single-handedly deliver policy change. Therefore, an evaluation approach focused on one actor will be limited in its ability to provide a useful understanding of how policy change was achieved.

As a result of these limitations, the evaluation report was able to provide an overview of some of the advocacy achievements, but it did not provide new information to Sightsavers teams or country office staff involved in the projects. It didn't reveal any new insights or provide useful recommendations or learnings to take forward in future projects. We were therefore looking for alternative approaches to the evaluation of advocacy.

Contribution analysis

Contribution analysis is an approach to evaluating the significance of different stakeholders in delivering the successes of a programme intervention. Instead of starting with the original project plans, contribution analysis begins at the end of a project, looks at the key achievements, and the role that was played in reaching them. Evidence is collected from multiple stakeholders, to demonstrate the extent to which they played a role in delivering the result. The end product is a Performance Story, articulating how each actor and contributed to the key achievements.

Contribution analysis has a number of advantages which make it more suited to the dynamics of policy and advocacy, including:

- A more flexible approach in which any achievements can be evaluated, not only those relating to original objectives.
- Giving a broader assessment of attribution involving all key actors involved in delivering change, beyond the role of Sightsavers and the project under review.
- Acknowledgement that many factors influence a given outcome. It is not trying to prove attribution or claim that Sightsavers was the sole driver of change.

Methodology

For the purposes of the contribution analysis, one example of an advocacy success achieved during IAPGII was selected from Senegal and one from Sierra Leone:

Senegal	Revision of the electoral code
Sierra Leone	Development of the national eye health policy

The examples of successes were selected to reflect some of the key achievements made in advocacy during IAPGII. The revision of the electoral code relates to the political participation project in Senegal, while the introduction of the new eye health policy relates to the eye health project in Sierra Leone, ensuring that the piece covered more than one thematic area. Senegal and Sierra Leone were selected due to the presence of PGA staff in country, making it more possible and cost-effective to conduct in-person interviews with

external stakeholders, while the team does not have a presence in Cameroon or Liberia. The piece was limited to assessing two achievements due to resource constraints.

In order to assess the extent to which Sightsavers played a role in delivering these advocacy successes, we conducted a range of interviews with Sightsavers staff who were involved in delivering policy and advocacy work in Senegal and Sierra Leone. In addition, we arranged interviews with representatives from partner organisations, government ministries, organisations for persons with disabilities, other international development organisations and any other stakeholders who played a role in the advocacy achievements under review. We used the same interview questions to provide a standardised framework between interviews and in both case studies.

In Senegal, a total of eleven people were interviewed, including representatives from Federation of organisations for persons with disabilities (FSAPH), the Directorate for Elections (DGE) and National Electoral Commission (CENA), civil society groups such as the group for the research and support for democratic participation and good governance (GRADE), as well as of Sightsavers regional and country office staff. In Sierra Leone, nine people were interviewed, including representatives from the Ministry of Health and National Eye Health Programme, current and former Sightsavers' staff, as well as members of other international organisations including Helen Keller International and Vision Aid Overseas.

Findings

- Conducting the contribution analysis piece was a useful exercise for the PGA team. The process revealed new information and insights into the advocacy achievements made during the Irish Aid PGII programme which had not been identified in the end-term evaluation, generating learning which can be taken forward in future projects. The information obtained from interviews with external stakeholders from government ministries, civil societies, OPDs and other NGOs was particularly useful, building a rich picture of how policy change was achieved in Senegal and Sierra Leone, and the interplay and dynamics between the key players.
- The response of partners was very positive. While some evaluation approaches can be interpreted as critical, partners were keen to engage with us on the contribution analysis piece and were very willing to give their time.
- The approach was shown to be very well suited to the area of policy and advocacy. The flexibility in the selection of achievements, and the taking into account of the contribution of other governmental and non-state actors to the result, produced more nuanced, interesting and useful learning.
- Contribution analysis is a labour-intensive evaluation approach. The data collection process, interviews with internal and external stakeholders was useful but very time consuming. The process was valuable, but it was only applied to two advocacy successes from the Irish Aid PGII programme, and it would not be realistic to apply this method to cover every advocacy achievement or to give a comprehensive overview of the entirety of Sightsavers' advocacy achievements in a large programme.

Conclusion

The piloting of contribution analysis has been a useful exercise in exploring new ways to evaluate the advocacy components of Sightsavers' projects. The pilot demonstrated proof of concept, the methodology was shown to work, and the piece has generated useful findings and learnings. However, it would not be realistic to apply the contribution analysis approach as the only evaluation of advocacy.

Contribution analysis would work best as an approach to complement existing evaluations, rather than as a replacement for the current evaluations of advocacy work done at Sightsavers. A contribution analysis piece could be used in a similar way to case studies, selecting a number of advocacy achievements in a programme when an evaluation is being done. This would help to ensure that evaluations are better able to capture Sightsavers' advocacy achievements and generate more valuable learning to be taken forward.