

## **C4D: Define ethical and quality evaluation standards for R,M&E**

### **What is it?**

It is important to agree on and be clear about what both the quality standards are for the R,M&E (issues such as rigor, contextuality, gender sensitivity, impartiality and other criteria about the quality of R,M&E), and what the ethical standards are (being respectful, sensitive, transparent and avoiding causing harm or raising false expectations). Quality and ethical standards should be agreed to early on, and adhered to throughout implementation. The ethical standards become particularly relevant considering methods and the workplan. It is also important to ensure there are processes to maintain awareness among all stakeholders about the agreed standards - for example by including a planned review process of the evaluation at key stages (e.g. the design, and the draft report - see [Review R,MandE systems and studies \(meta evaluation\)](#)).

### **General information on quality standards**

The Rainbow Framework covers general guidance on agreeing to [quality and ethical standards](#), with links to information on ethical guidelines and quality standards. The UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) (to which UNICEF adheres) offers several [guidance documents](#), including:

- [UNEG Norms and Standards](#)
- [UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#)
- [UN Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System](#)

There are 13 'Norms' in the UNEG Norms and Standards, ranging from stating that UN agencies should have evaluation policies in place to discussions around impartiality, independence and ethics. There are four 'Standards' (which overlap somewhat with the 13 Norms), each with a series of sub-level standards. These pages and resources are recommended background reading before considering methods to apply to C4D.

### **General information on ethics in R,M&E**

Ethics can feel quite challenging, but it really comes down to being respectful, transparent and avoiding causing harm. Important to identify any ethical risks and develop strategies and processes for managing these. There are many resources available on this topic, with a comprehensive list available on the [Ethical Guidelines](#) page on BetterEvaluation.

### **Applying the C4D principles**

#### **Accountable**

The quality and ethical standards for C4D R,M&E should reflect the expectations of all the people and groups we are accountable to (donors and managers, partners and community groups). Defining and following quality and ethical standards is important for maintaining accountability and integrity in RM&E. Ensuring ethical practices in RM&E is a responsibility of everyone involved in the R,M&E.

#### **Critical**

It is important to question existing sets of standards and their relevance in the local setting. We need to ask: whose interests and expectations are reflected in the quality and ethical standards? what are the assumptions embedded in the standards? what other perspectives are missing from those standards?

## **Participatory**

Participatory processes can be used to develop and clarify quality and ethical standards with partners, and community groups. This ensures that standards lay out appropriate practices in keeping with local standards and expectations. In terms of ethical standards, participatory approaches to define ethical standards can help ensure these are locally appropriate, especially where participatory methods are used, or where sensitive topics are being explored.

## **Holistic**

Our expectations and perceptions of quality and ethics are culturally bound. In seeking agreement on quality and ethical standards it is important to understand these in the context of social, cultural, and organisational systems.

## **Realistic**

In C4D the ethical standards should cover sharing results and findings in accessible ways (especially with marginalised groups and those who were consulted in the data collection and report writing process) as an ethical responsibility. This also helps with promoting a learning-based culture and continuous learning.

# **Recommended methods and adaptations for Quality Standards and C4D**

## **Independence, impartiality and perceived conflicts**

- C4D: Establish Decision making processes

Where there is a perceived conflict between participatory approaches of R,M&E and the Quality Standards (i.e. independence and impartiality), it may be useful to think of the range of methods for including stakeholders in participatory ways, including in decision making. The Participation Matrix can be a useful way to balance the quality standards and participatory approaches.

## **Example**

- My Rights My Voice completion report 2011-2016

This is a report summarising the evaluation findings of the My Right My Voice (MRMV) program. It is an example of how an evaluation can be conducted by both young, peer-evaluators and a professional consultant evaluator.

## **General resources on ethics in R,M&E**

- Below are some relevant resources with a particular focus on children and adolescents.
- So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A toolkit supporting children’s meaningful and ethical participation in re...

This practical toolkit by Laws and Mann for Save the Children (2004), includes key principles, case studies and a checklist of key ethical considerations in M&E involving children.

- Participatory approaches

Participatory Approaches by Irene Guijt (2014) is part of a series of Methodological Briefs by the UNICEF Office of Research. It offers comprehensive guidance on involving children in participatory M&E, including a checklist of key ethical concerns.

- Ethical Research Involving Children

A compendium put together by UNICEF with a range of other partners, covering harms and benefits, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, payment and compensation, a section on available supports, sections on the different stages (planning, design, data collection, analysis & dissemination etc.), and finishing with a long list of case studies.

- Evaluation Technical Notes - UNICEF Evaluation Office (archived link)

Provides an overview of ethical considerations when involving children in M&E.

- Doing qualitative field research on gender norms with adolescent girls and their families

This research and practice note includes practical advice, examples and tools to ensure gender sensitivity in evaluation and research with adolescent girls.

It is consistent with the C4D Evaluation Framework in the following ways:

- **Critical:** the guide takes seriously the gender-specific considerations that are required for ethical evaluation research and provides practical tools
- **Participation:** using this guide will help ensure meaningful participation and voice by adolescent girls in evaluation research.
- **Holistic:** the guide suggests open-ended questions and including family members in research to bring a holistic understanding.

- Oxfam Responsible Program Data Policy

This document outlines a rights-based policy for ethical data management, based on the following rights: the right to be counted and heard; the right to dignity and respect; the right to make an informed decision; the right to privacy; and the right to not be put at risk.

This policy is consistent with the C4D Evaluation Framework in the following ways:  
**Critical:** The policy recognises that data and ownership of data entails a position of power and responsibility, and the importance of the rights of marginalised groups in this process. **Accountable:** The policy emphasises the ethical dimensions of data management processes and responsibilities.

- C4D: Manage data

Good data management means that systems are in place for consistent and ethical (see Define ethical and quality evaluation standards) collection, recording, storage, security, backing up, cleaning, and modifying, and ownership of data. This is part of data quality assurance (DQA).

## Specific resources on ethics and C4D R,M&E

- Equal access participatory monitoring and evaluation toolkit

This toolkit aims to help communication for development (C4D) organisations to demonstrate the impacts and outcomes of their initiatives, listen to their listeners, continuously learn, and feed this learning back into the organisation and its practices.

- The IDEAS guide and facilitators' guide

Modules 5 and 8 of this guide include activities to learn about common ethical risks in media and communication projects and evaluation, and to reflect on how these relate to projects. This resource is particularly good as an entry level guide.