

## Results from the ALNAP Survey of Evaluation Managers

The following is based on the results of a survey carried out as part of ALNAP's utilisation of evaluation study. This study is in progress and will be published as part of ALNAP's Review of Humanitarian Action in 2005. The survey targeted external evaluators and internal managers, and was posted on the ALNAP website over three weeks in June/July 2006, and was circulated to over 600 ALNAP members.

In total 46 respondents took part in the survey, and though this cannot be considered a representative sample, the responses provided a rich source of data, that will contribute to the final analysis. The results are merely collated below, and no analysis has been attempted at this stage.

We would very much like to thank the respondents for taking the time to provide us with the benefit of their perspective and, in many cases, considerable experience.

**2. How would you describe the “utilisation” of evaluations? Please include examples from your experience where possible.**

*Over two-thirds of the responses described utilisation as tangible changes in policy, operational approach, systems etc. For some, this was expressed as an action plan which could act as a management tool. A much smaller number (16%) referred to internal/individual learning in terms of changes in thinking, behaviour and in the clarification of ideas.*

**3. In your experience, are there particular factors that help promote the use of an evaluation? If so, what are the THREE most important ones - and WHY?**

*Ownership or “buy-in” to the evaluation was the most often stated promoting factors (two thirds of responses). This was closely followed by the quality of the report, including factors such as clarity and conciseness, and in particular the quality of the recommendations which have to be relevant, practical, do-able and prioritised. Participation of the stakeholders throughout the process was also considered important (and closely related to ownership), and a third of the respondents identified the need for a learning culture in the organisation or team (e.g. valuing and understanding evaluations, openness to criticism). 21% thought a clearly defined purpose and TOR promotes use, with competence and credibility of the evaluators, and an explicit learning focus in the evaluation also featuring strongly.*

*Additional factors mentioned: timing (in line with decision-making cycles or opportunities), transparency, senior management ownership, balanced presentation (not too negative), the targeting of recommendations to specific stakeholders and mixed internal and external teams.*

**4. In your experience, are there particular factors that inhibit the use of an evaluation? If so, what are the THREE most important ones – and WHY?**

*As well as the converse of promoting factors above, the most frequently mentioned inhibiting factor (50% of respondents) is the imposition of an evaluation (a top down approach) by HQ and/or donors. The second and third most mentioned factors respectively were an arrogant, fault-finding or ivory tower approach by the evaluators and insufficient time for the evaluation leading to superficial results. Other important inhibitors were mentioned as: confusion and suspicion in the field due to a lack of clarity (and consultation) over the purpose of the evaluation; poor dissemination (in some cases the report is not even sent to the field) and a programme's inability to implement the recommendations (e.g. due to lack of capacity, resources and high staff turnover).*

*Single comments included the lack of incentive to act on evaluations (not least because they are not perceived as a basis for funding decisions made by donors), excessive workloads in the field, risk-averse staff, weak linking of the learning from evaluations to organisational change processes.*

5. Have you observed variations in use according to the *type* (ex-post, real-time, joint or inter-agency, internal or independent)? If so, please describe and suggest why you think the type would influence use.

42% of respondents did not perceive a pattern of greater use according to the type of evaluation. Others thought use was a variable of the right "fit" between the evaluation type and the evaluation purpose (e.g. if immediate change, RTE or mid-term review, if system-wide focus, then joint), or of good evaluation practice (follow-up, participation etc), or of personality.

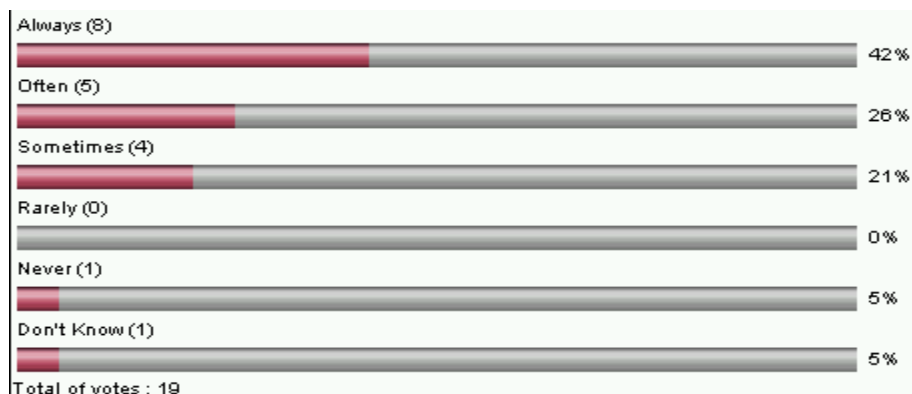
Of those who viewed a pattern, the use-rate of RTE was evenly split between those viewing it as having the most impact (more participatory, immediate) or the least (high staff turnover, poor analysis, diverts and overburdens staff or not truly real-time). 10% saw peer review approaches to joint evaluations as effective. Ex-post evaluation was viewed as having a limited impact by a third of respondents (too late, low ownership); this mostly applied to the project level but was also viewed as too backward-looking for policy development too. Single responses referred to the limited impact of DEC evaluations and to the positive effect of mixed internal and external teams, and of initiatives such as ACT's use of a Learning Support Advisor for on-going learning and advice.

6. **Objective: understanding the types of and degree of utilisation and post-evaluation follow-up**

**Process prior to the evaluation:**

(The term "evaluator" refers to those you commission to carry out evaluations and/or yourself if you carry out some of your organisation's evaluation.)

- a) You carry out an analysis of which individuals will be the main evaluation users and who would be in a position to take decisions based on the findings, before you start the evaluation



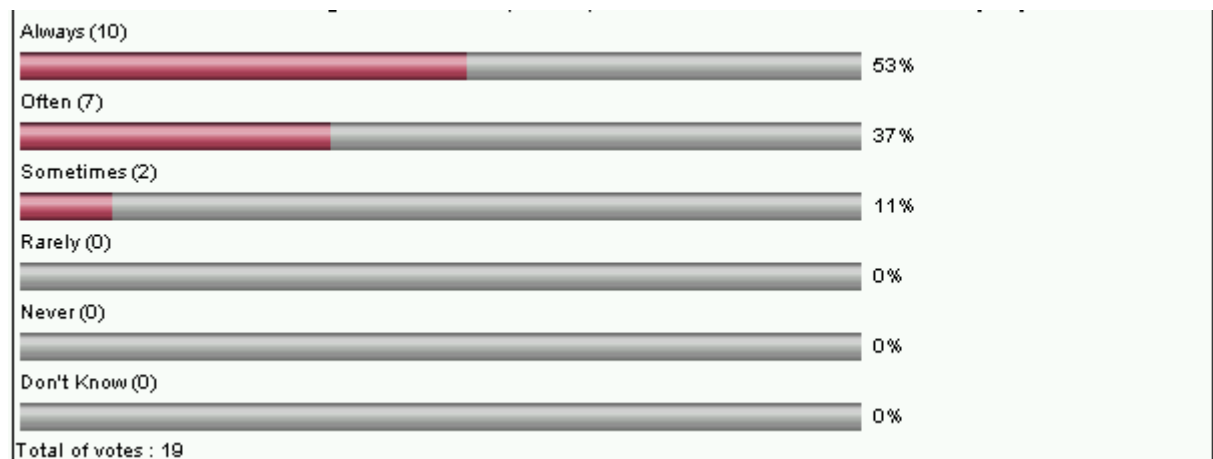
- b) The design of the evaluation is based on its purpose and eventual use (e.g. emphasis on particular stakeholders, types of user-participation, feedback approaches, team composition etc)



- c) Typically, you (and the evaluator/s) establish specific follow-up mechanisms for each evaluation (i.e. actual individuals/posts with decision-making capacity, designated to act or take responsibility)



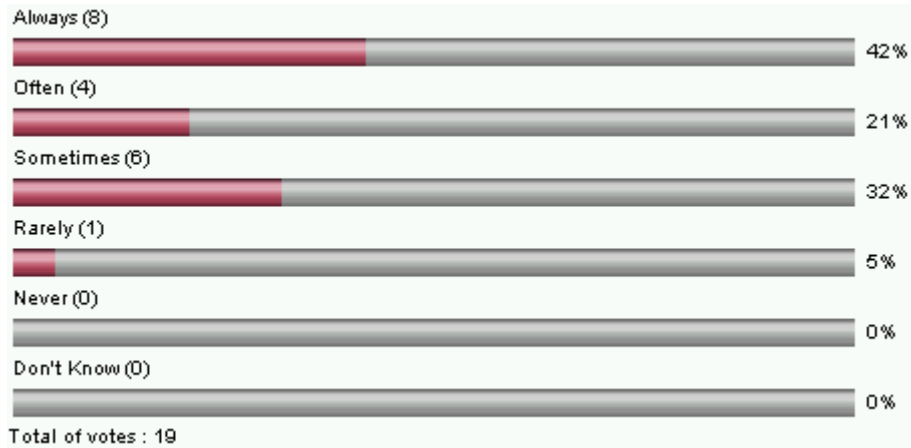
- d) The formulation of the TOR's purpose and design is a participatory process involving the evaluator/s and all the intended users (at HQ, Regional AND Field level)



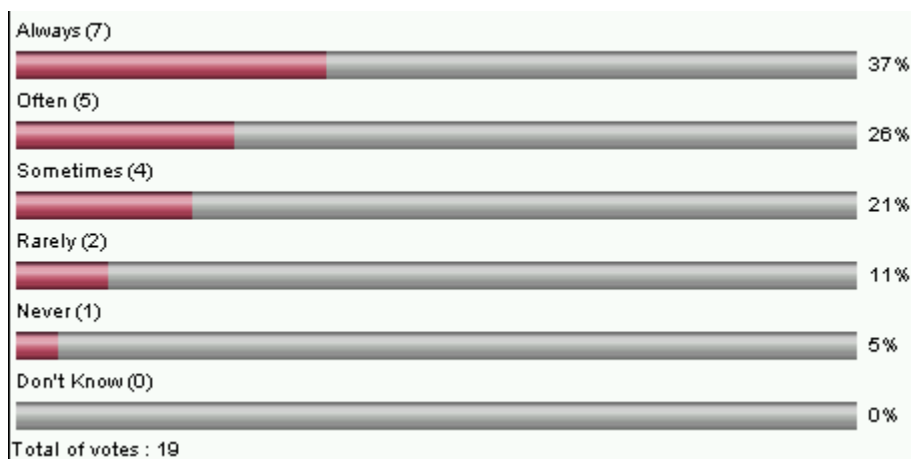
- e) There is a specific provision in the budget for the evaluator/s to consult intended users about the purpose and design of the evaluation prior to starting the evaluation



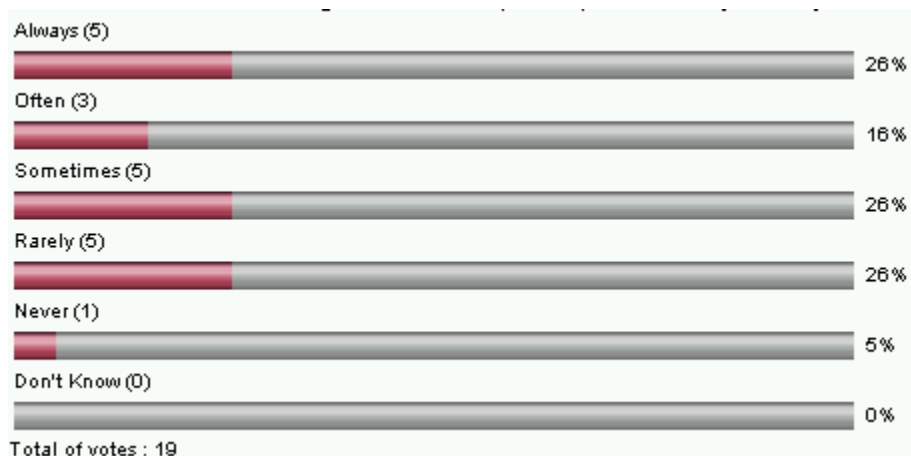
**f) The TOR explicitly refers to the intended use and users of the evaluation**



**g) A variety of dissemination methods are planned by you and the evaluator/s to suit different stakeholders (i.e. *in addition* to the standard final report and executive summary)**

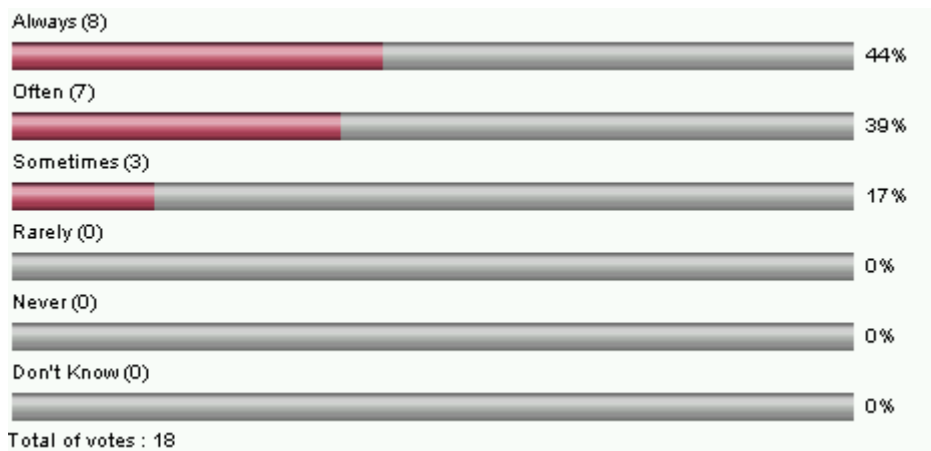


**h) There is specific provision in the budget for the dissemination of results**

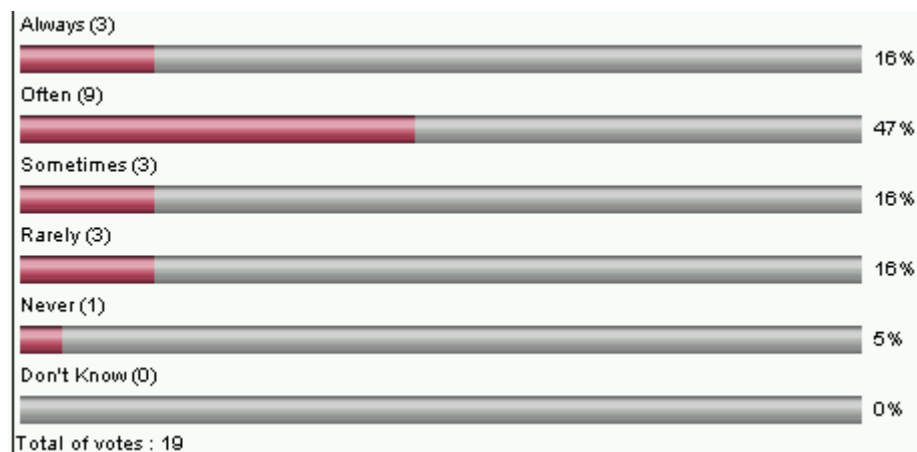


## During the Evaluation

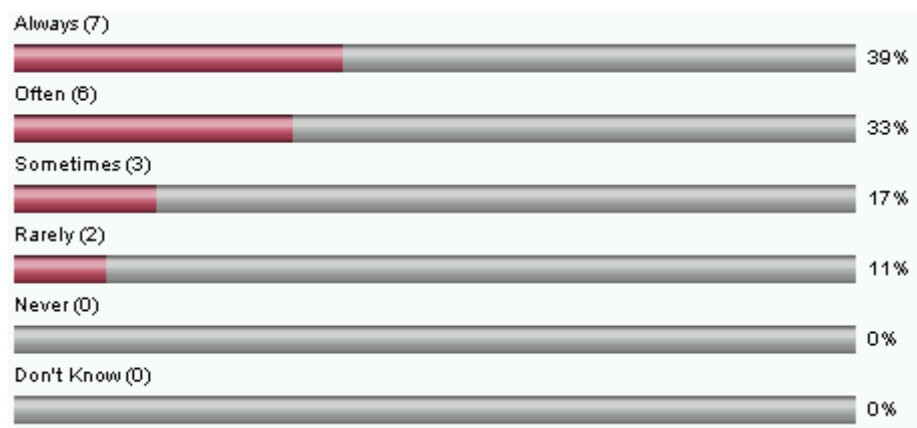
- i) You establish a mechanism for the evaluator/s to communicate regularly with key stakeholders throughout the evaluation (e.g. with a Steering Group, with staff whilst in the field, with you/the evaluation manager)



- j) There is flexibility built into the time-frame and a budget to permit adaptation of the evaluation process to the context and emerging needs



- k) The evaluator/s “test” their recommendations with intended users for feasibility and relevance, prior to the writing of the report



## Post-Evaluation

### l) You provide the evaluator/s with specific feedback on the quality of the evaluation



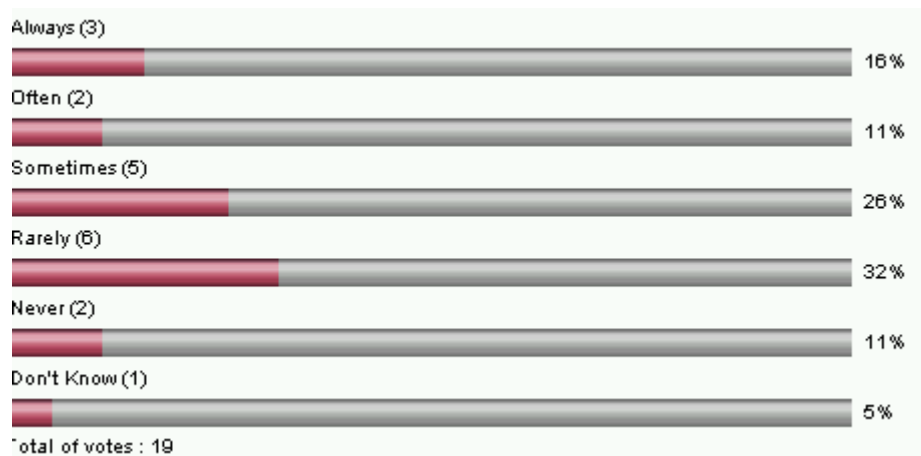
### m) Overall, you think the number of days allocated in evaluation budgets is equivalent or at least not less than the number of days actually worked by the evaluator/s



### n) You provide the evaluator with systematic and detailed feedback on what actions have been taken in relation to the findings of the evaluation



- o) Following programme or project evaluations and reviews, the key findings are communicated to the programme's beneficiaries in the field**



- p) There is systematic monitoring by a designated individual or unit of actions taken in response to the evaluation**

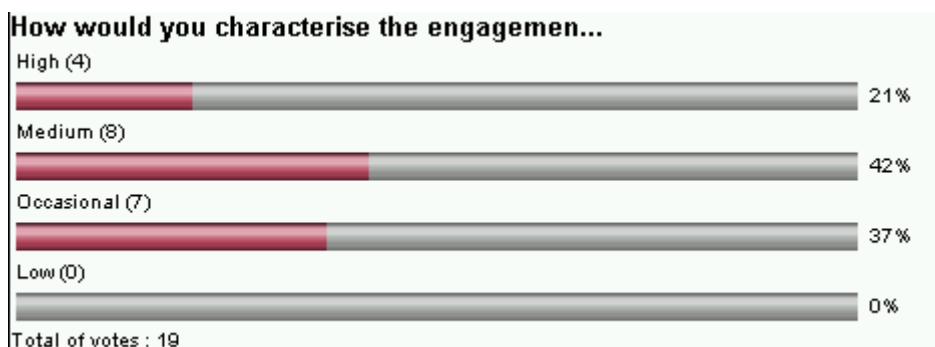


**Questions 7-11. Objective: exploring links between internal evaluation staff and key decision-makers**

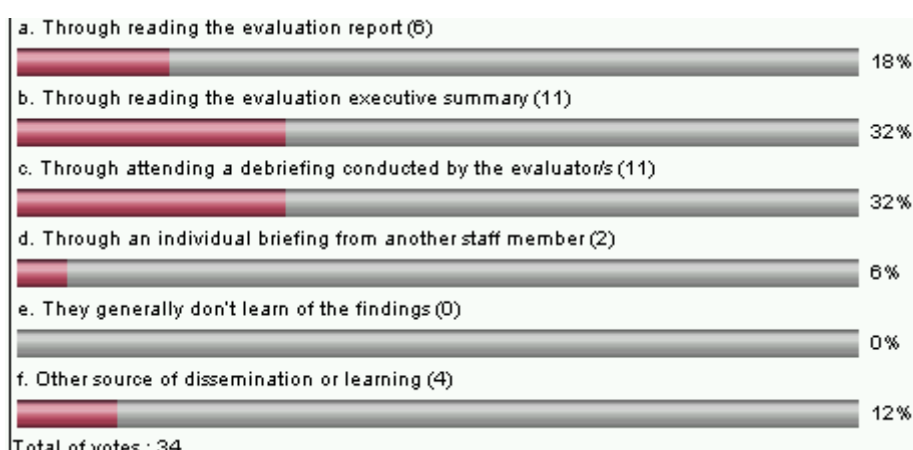
- 7. To whom (post) do you or the evaluation unit directly report?**

Nearly half the evaluation managers who responded, report directly to very senior positions (Chief or Deputy Chief Executives, Secretary of State, relevant Minister). 21% reported to the Heads of the Emergency Department, 10% to their deputies. A small number (10%) reported to the Heads of a Learning/M&E unit or the question was not applicable (10%).

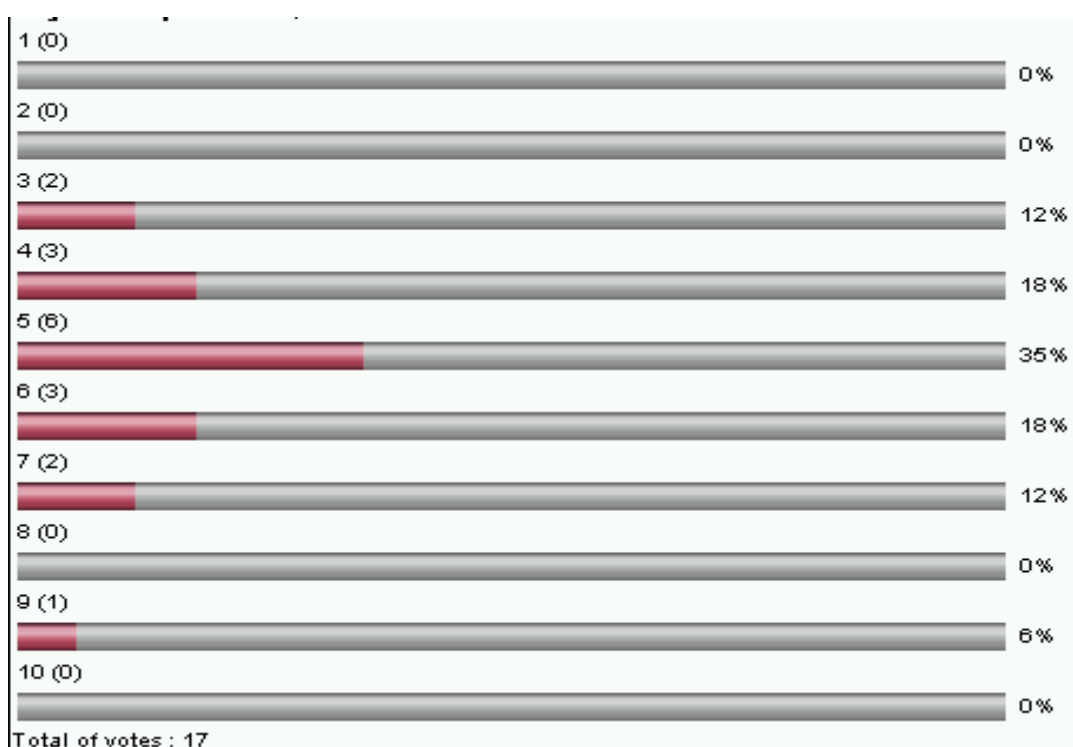
- 8. How would you characterise the engagement of relevant senior managers and policy makers with your evaluation work overall?**



9. How do senior managers and policy-makers learn of the evaluation findings and recommendations? Please choose the two most common ways from the list below. If “other”, please describe.



10. In your experience, how influential are evaluation findings on the decision-making of senior staff? Please insert a number on a scale from 1 – 10. (1 is low influence, 10 is high)



11. What other influences or types of information tend to motivate decision-makers to change policy and practice? (This refers to factors which are *not* related to evaluations. They may be internal or external influences).

*Decision-makers are influenced by a wide range of information sources and pressures. External influences allegedly dominate with over half of the respondents mentioned two particular motivations to change: the media (opportunities or threats to reputation) and donor influence (views, strategic and funding priorities, monitoring trips). A close third (37%) was the influence of peers (the opinions and exchanges taking place between agencies). 15% separately mentioned the following influences: field staff feedback and trip reports, annual discussions of synthesised evaluation findings, internal governance pressures (Board, Trustees). Single comments included internal publications and discussions/debates, beneficiary needs assessments, personal biases and corridor/pub anecdotal information and gossip.*

**Last Section; questions 12-15. Objective: Perceptions of motivation**

**12. In your experience, what are the most common reasons for your organisation to commission an evaluation? – They are not necessarily the purpose or motivation stated in the TOR. Please rank the following in order of frequency where 1 if the most common, 4 the least.**

- a. **Formal Accountability** (it has to be done: obligations to donors, trustees etc, summative, routine. Rarely commissioned by the “subject” of the evaluation)
- b. **Improving the Programme**
- c. **Learning for the organisation** (e.g. to inform organisational thinking and policy making and add to institutional knowledge)
- d. **Legitimising** (to add credence to or challenge an existing agenda or decision already made)

*This question was badly phrased and the web tool was not designed for ranking. As a result the responses cannot be treated with any confidence. A pattern of the relative importance of the factors **may** be suggested. Formal Accountability and Improving the Programme were most often assigned a value of 1 or 2, rarely or never a 4. Organisational learning was most often assigned a 2 or 3. Legitimising was fairly evenly spread across all values. This may suggest that formal accountability and improving the programme are more often the reason for evaluations, but the pattern is not strong.*

**13. Are any of these categories of motivation/purpose more or less likely to lead to greater use of your evaluations? Please comment if you have observed any pattern and suggest why that should be.**

*Only 11 answers were given out of the 19 questionnaires, and two of these pointed out that the question was too simplistic or arbitrary. 5 of the respondents however commented that evaluations motivated primarily by ‘improving were more likely to lead to use. The remaining single responses were evenly spread across formal accountability, organisational learning and legitimising.*

**14. In your experience, do different types of post-holder respond differently to evaluation findings? (e.g. their level of seniority, field or headquarters, policy or operational, administration, technical, management etc). Please explain who and why.**

*Overall, there was no post-holder pattern of use observed. Variations in use relate more strongly to the “fit” between the evaluation focus or purpose and the post holder or between relevant sections of the report and an individual’s responsibilities. Variations between field and HQ, junior and senior, policy and operational staff etc were not clearly demonstrated.*

**15. What would you change in your organisation to facilitate increased use of evaluations?**

*The most frequent factor that respondents would change is the attitude of senior managers to evaluations and their organisational culture of learning (arguably the same thing). Senior managers often do not value or understand evaluation sufficiently (37%), and several organisations have a culture of defensiveness towards criticism rather than of learning and reflection (26%). Over a third of respondents would like to refocus their evaluation culture away from formal “pure” accountability evaluations towards a focus on learning through active review and greater participation and engagement of stakeholders. A fifth would introduce more systematic follow up mechanisms and train staff on the meaning and value of evaluation. Single comments included more time and resources, better quality evaluations, better information management and creating an evaluation unit or policy.*

## Results from Survey Questions for Independent/External Evaluators

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In total 46 respondents took part in the survey, and though this cannot be considered a representative sample, the responses provided a rich source of data, that will contribute to the final analysis. The results are merely collated below, and no analysis has been attempted at this stage.

We would very much like to thank the respondents for taking the time to provide us with the benefit of their perspective and, in many cases, considerable experience.

### 2. How long have you worked as an evaluator (years)?

*The average of the respondents was 8 years  
A third had worked as evaluators for 10 or more years*

### 3. From memory, roughly how many evaluations (of all types including reviews) have you done?

*Average of at least 21 evaluations*

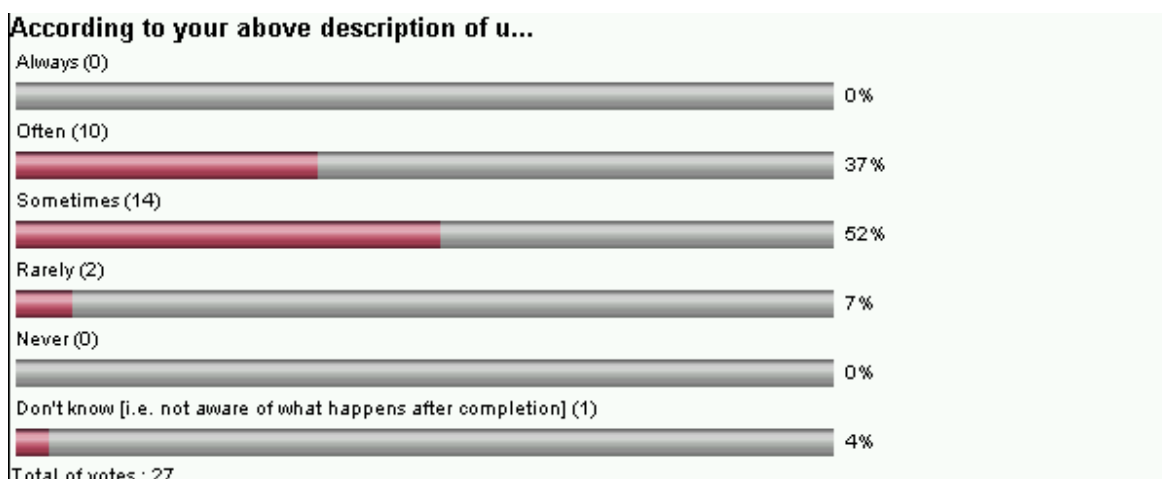
### 4. How would you describe the "utilisation" of evaluations? Include any examples of utilisation drawn from your own evaluations if possible

*Responses described a mixture of direct and indirect impact. Overall, more than half (55%) assessed use as tangible action, such as changes to policy, systems and practice in particular (22%), or structured responses particularly from management and changes to subsequent programme design and training programmes. Nearly a third observed important but less tangible learning during the evaluation, particularly in the field. This learning effect was strongly related to a participatory approach that facilitated reflection and increased ownership. It was often thought to lead to more learning than the traditional evaluation product of the final report.*

*Examples of utilisation included enhanced working relations and communications between a donor and partner, and direct changes to the methodology of a peace/education programme. Utilisation included the unanticipated use of evaluation results such as another - non-participating agency- using the findings to lobby for health finance changes in Liberia. Several respondents commented that it was easier to generate learning with individuals than with organisations, and that use was greater in smaller organisations.*

*Examples of poor utilisation included the suppression of evaluation reports because they were critical or did not corroborate the beliefs or support the political agenda of individuals in the agency. Several respondents commented that the more critical the report, the less likely it was to be used at all - the implication being that resistance to criticism led to the entire report being shelved. Others noted that in several cases the field did not even receive the report. One evaluator commented that "rather grand processes" of feedback workshops and meetings were no guarantee of action. Several evaluators did not know whether their evaluation had been used or not.*

5. According to your above description of utilisation, how often do stakeholders “utilise” your evaluations? (this is a subjective, overall assessment)



89% think their evaluations are often or sometimes used

6. In your experience, are there particular factors that help promote the use of an evaluation? If so, what are the THREE most important ones – and WHY?

Two use-promoting factors were most frequently mentioned: participation and leadership. The participation of users includes intensive consultation, participatory review and ongoing discussion before and during the evaluation. Equally important is the commitment of management to the evaluation and, similarly, leadership generating an organisational or team culture of learning.

A close third related to the quality of the report, in particular to credible, relevant practical recommendations and to the concise, accessible presentation of results. One respondent had created a web-based summary of a report with links to further detail. A quarter of the responses stated that a clear terms of reference with an agreement on the purpose and use at the outset was a key factor. Four respondents said that transparency in general and publication in particular was important to promote use. Other comments related to greater openness to learning when the findings were generally good, the importance of the evaluator's personal commitment to promote learning and their understanding of the context and constraints faced by teams. Good programme monitoring systems, timing (both in terms of staff commitments and programme cycles), high profile programmes, evaluation finding's conformity to prevailing policy development and staff understanding of evaluation and its value also featured.

Single comments referred to the positive effect of pressure to change (from donors, the Board etc), adequate preparation time for both client and evaluator and the need for an individual (a “champion”) to promote use.

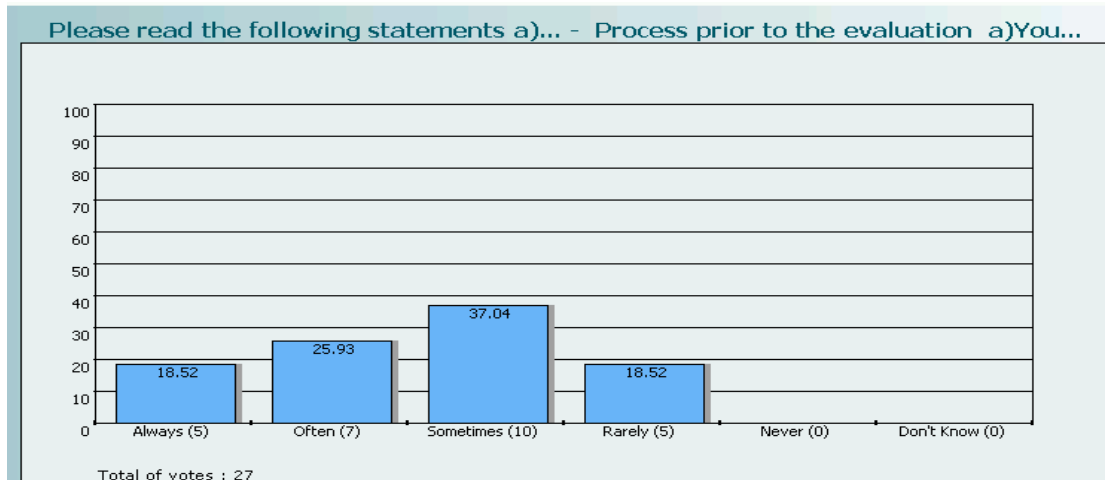
7. In your experience, are there particular factors that inhibit the use of an evaluation? If so, what are the THREE most important ones – and WHY?

The most frequent inhibiting factor (mentioned by 37%) was that the evaluation was commissioned as a formality: it was motivated by donor requirements or institutional programme cycle systems, rather than “owned” or reflecting a commitment to change. Again, lack of senior management commitment and poorly drafted TORs with unclear purposes and poor design were constraints. Over a fifth separately mentioned three factors of: fear of criticism leading to damage to reputation and funding; defensiveness and resistance to change; and high staff workload and turnover.

Several comments were largely the converse of the positive factors, but additional constraints included the cost of evaluations, an unhelpful rigidity in the use of evaluation standards/approaches, the lack of power (or absence) of evaluation units, major changes in the programme (e.g. funding/closure) or external environment (e.g. evacuation) rendering recommendations largely redundant. Finally, two people mentioned a “reality gap” between the perceptions of HQ and the reality in the field; the former were surprised and dismissive of findings at odds with their assumptions about the programme.

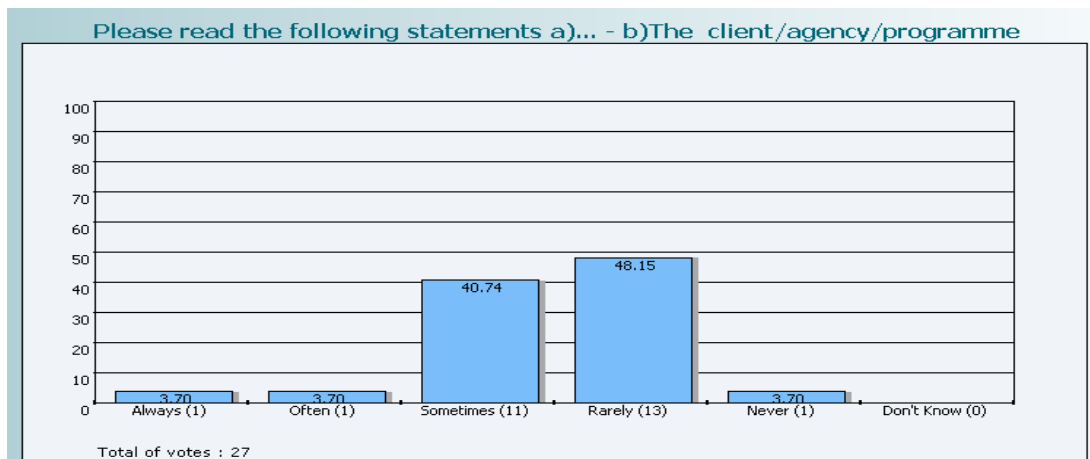
8. Process prior to the evaluation:

- a) You or the client have identified the intended evaluation users and those who are in a position to take decisions before you start the evaluation



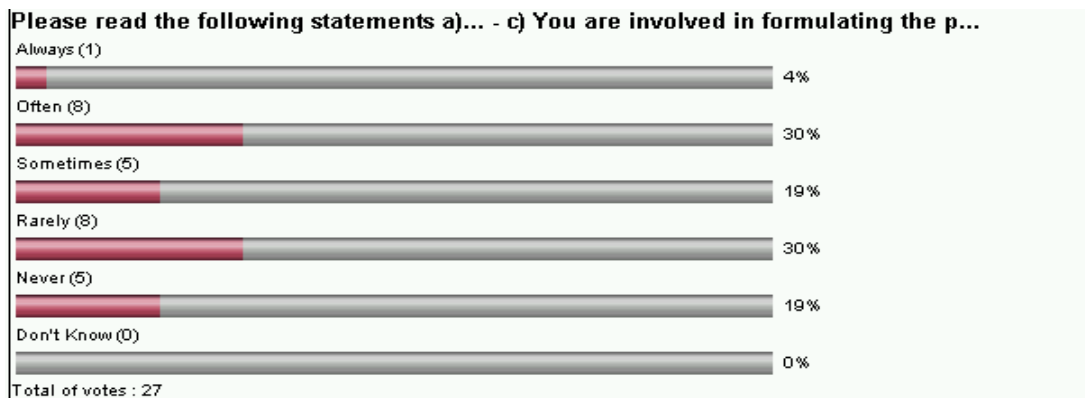
Nearly half of the responses indicated that evaluation users were often or always identified.

- b) The client/agency/programme establishes specific follow-up mechanisms (i.e. actual individuals/posts designated to act or take responsibility for recommendations)



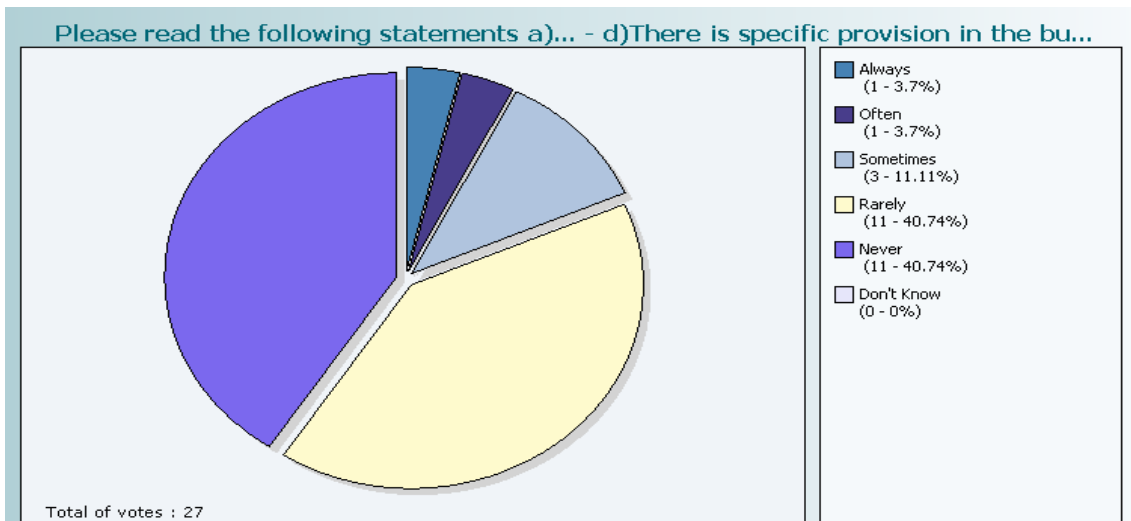
Nearly half of the respondents' clients had not established follow up mechanisms

- c) You are involved in formulating the purpose and design of the evaluation, in full consultation with the intended users, prior to the finalisation of the TOR and start of the evaluation (i.e. at HQ, Regional AND Field level if applicable)



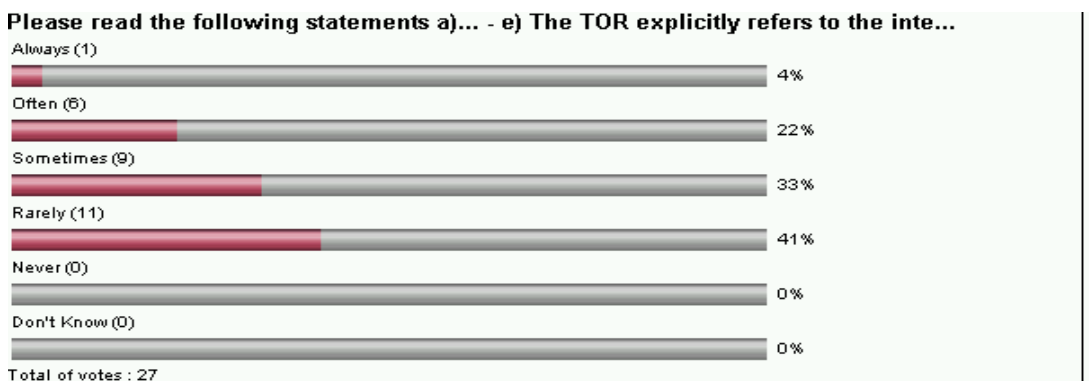
*A third typically consulted with the users prior to the final TOR; nearly half rarely or never.*

- d) There is specific provision in the budget for you to consult intended users about the purpose and design prior to starting the evaluation



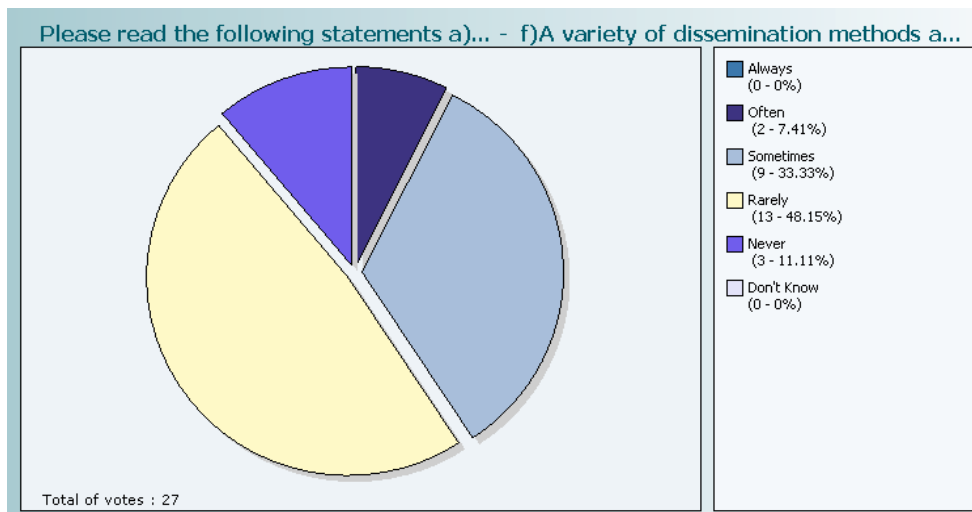
*The majority replied that there was rarely or never a budget for this preparatory consultation.*

- e) The TOR explicitly refers to the intended use and users of the evaluation



*A quarter often or always found TORs clear about users and use, the majority only sometimes or rarely.*

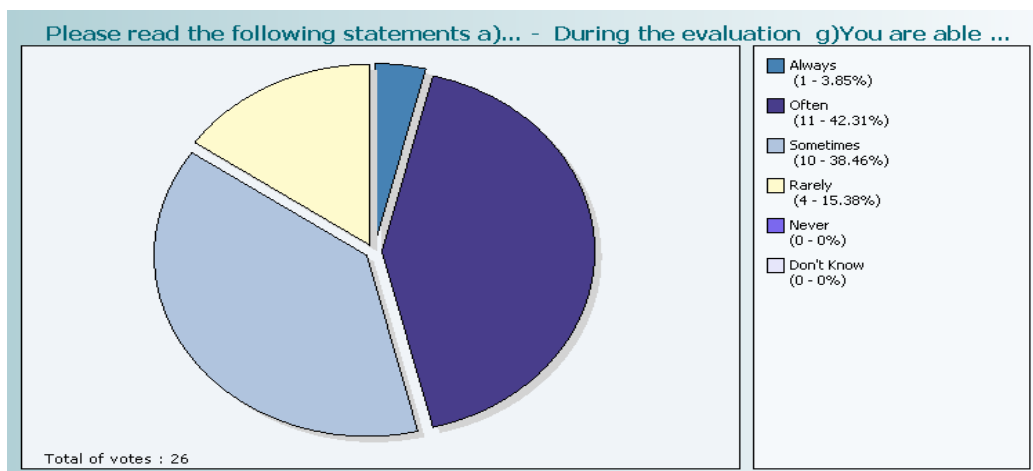
- f) A variety of dissemination methods are planned by the client to suit different stakeholders (i.e. in addition to the standard final report and executive summary)



*The responses suggest that adapted and varied methods of dissemination are not the norm; nearly two-thirds rarely or never produce other forms than the report and exsum.*

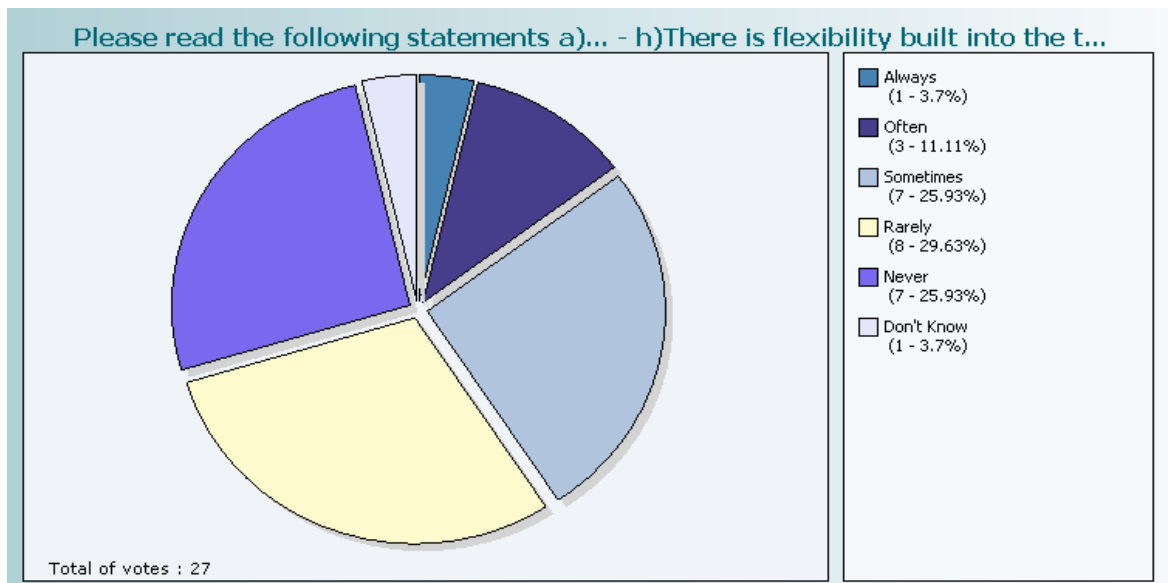
#### During the Evaluation

- g) You are able to communicate findings and issues with key stakeholders regularly throughout the evaluation (e.g. with a Steering Group, with staff whilst in the field, with the evaluation manager)



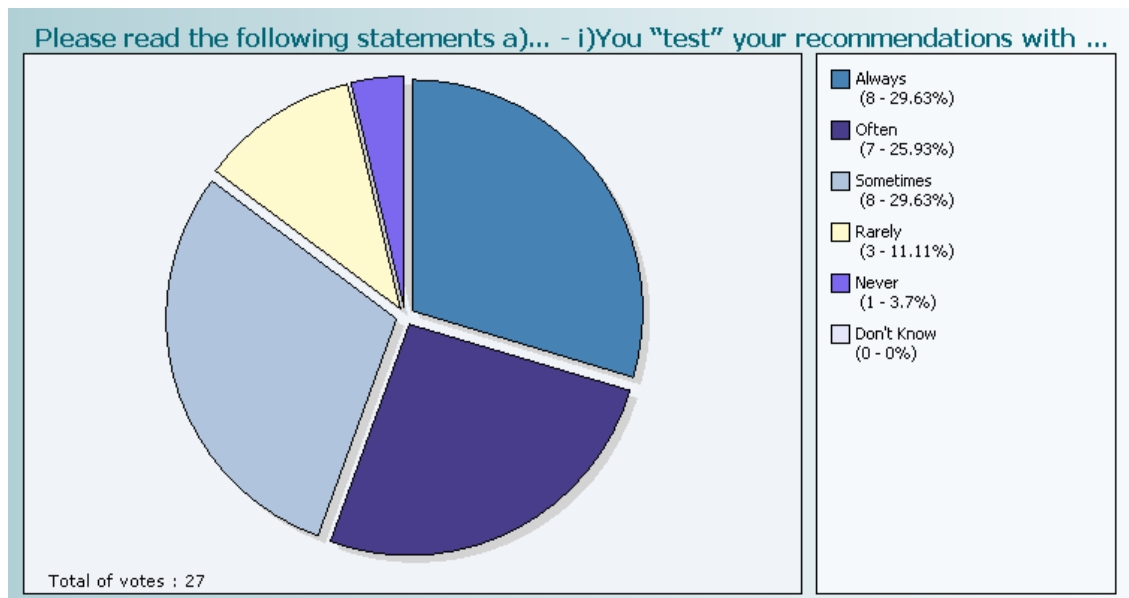
*Nearly half the respondents often or always have regular communications with key stakeholders during the evaluation.*

- h) **There is flexibility built into the time-frame and a budget to permit adaptation of the evaluation process to the context and emerging needs**



*It is not common for TORs to build in flexibility and budget to adapt the evaluation approach. The majority of evaluators have experienced this rarely or never.*

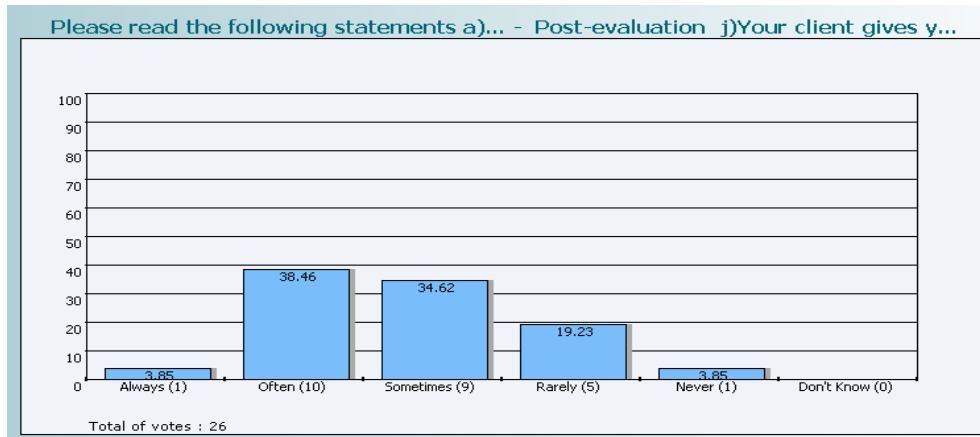
- i) **You “test” your recommendations with intended users for feasibility and relevance, prior to the writing of the report**



*Testing recommendations is the norm amongst the respondents: more than half do so often or always with only a minority rarely or never.*

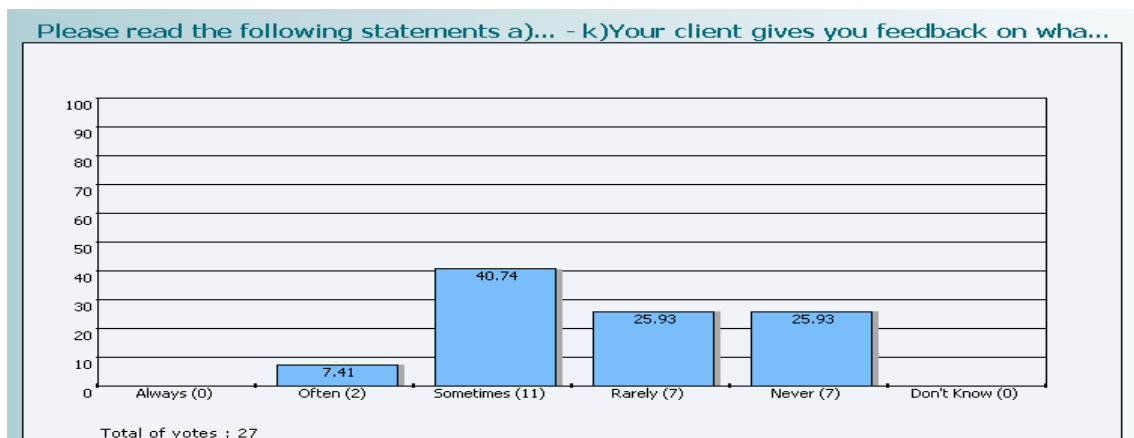
**Post-Evaluation**

**j) Your client gives you specific feedback on the quality of your evaluation**



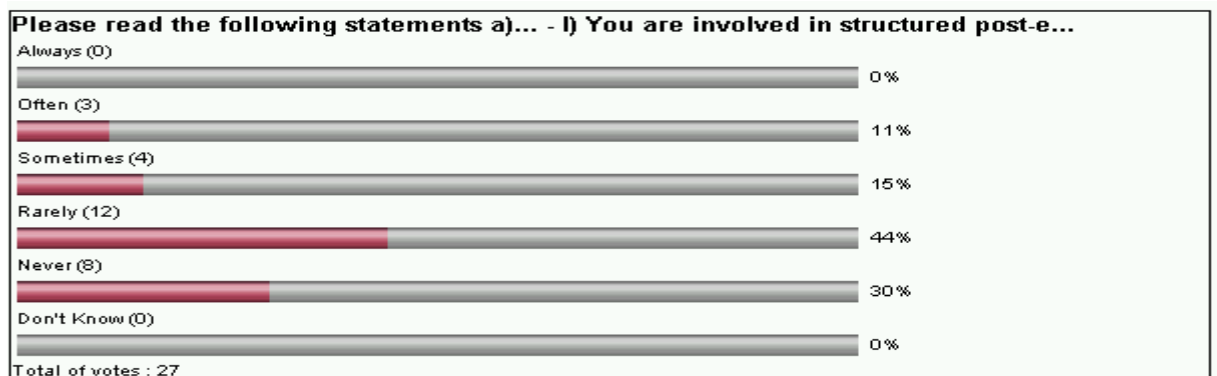
Most of the respondents regularly receive feedback on their work with only a fifth rarely or never.

**k) Your client gives you feedback on what actions have been taken in relation to the findings of the evaluation**



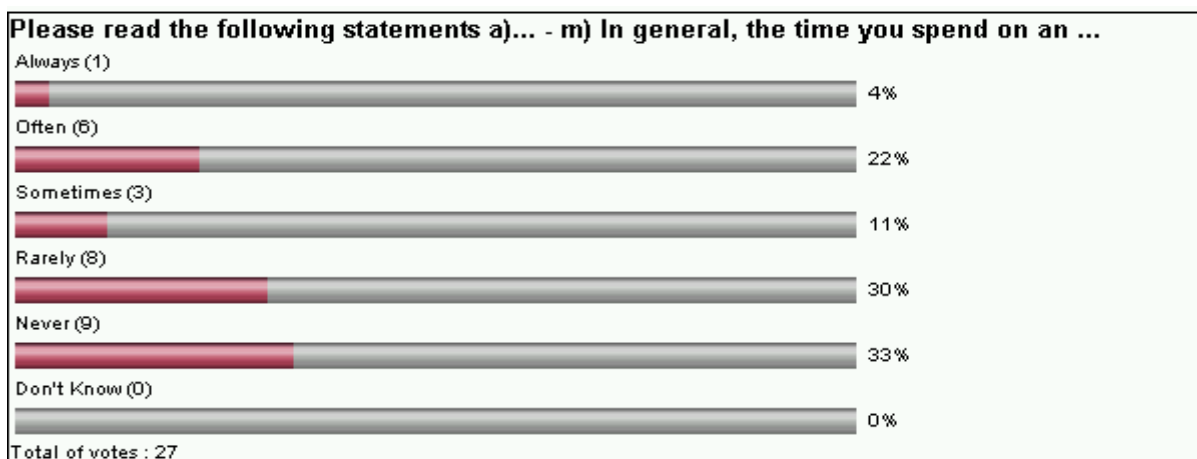
It is unusual for evaluators to receive feedback on follow-up action. Over half rarely or never do.

**l) You are involved in structured post-evaluation activities (such as to revisit the field, member of a follow-up advisory group, other)**



It is even rarer for evaluators to be involved in structured follow-up activities.

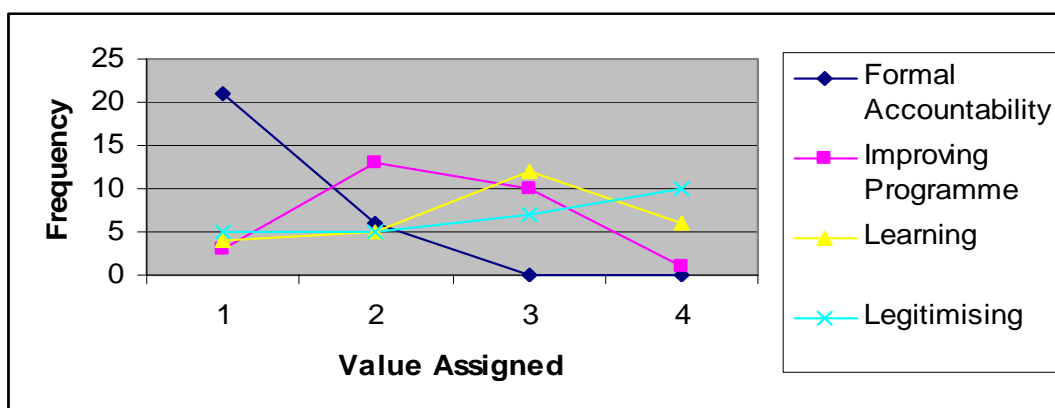
m) In general, the time you spend on an evaluation is equal (or at least not much more) than the number of days allocated in the budget



Whilst a quarter of evaluators complete the work within the budgeted time, some two thirds rarely or never do.

9. In your experience, what are the most common reasons for commissioning an evaluation? – these may not necessarily be the purpose stated in the TOR. Please rank the following in order of frequency where 1 if the most common, 4 the least.

- Formal Accountability** (it has to be done: obligations to donors, trustees etc, routine evaluation cycle. Rarely commissioned by the “subject” of the evaluation)
- Improving the Programme**
- Learning for the organisation** (e.g. to inform organisational thinking and policy making and add to institutional knowledge)
- Legitimising** (to add credence to or challenge an existing agenda or decision already made)



Formal Accountability was clearly the most common reason for commissioning evaluations (position 1 by 78% of respondents, never 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>). Improving the programme was the second most prioritised reason positioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> by 48% and 3<sup>rd</sup> (by 37%). Learning for the organisation and Legitimising were most often in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place.

10. Are any of these categories of motivation/purpose more or less likely to lead to greater use of your evaluations? Please comment if you have observed any pattern and if so – WHY?

A third of respondents did not identify a link between different reasons for commissioning evaluations and their use. Such a link was either thought to be too simplistic, or the respondent did not know. Of those who identified a pattern, the largest number (26%) thought that those motivated by an improvement and/or learning objective were more likely to lead to use.

**11. Have you observed variations in use according to the type (ex-post, real-time, joint, inter-agency, internal review or independent)? If so, please describe and suggest why you think the type would influence use.**

*The majority (a third) had either not observed a pattern or had not had experience of different types of evaluation to base observations upon. 18% said that real time evaluation had led to greater use; 11% respectively had observed better utilisation from joint/inter-agency and independent/external evaluations. Individual comments were made on the benefits of mixed internal and external teams, ex-post evaluation for policy and strategic change and management reviews and the limited effectiveness of joint evaluations due to their greater complexity and defensiveness on the part of individual agencies.*

**12. In your experience, do different types of post-holder respond differently to evaluation findings? (e.g. their level of seniority, field or headquarters, policy or operational). Please explain who and why.**

*26% thought that field staff were the most open to evaluation use and 22% thought middle and senior managers the least likely to be receptive to evaluation. 11% had found junior staff to be more receptive. 22% thought the question too simplistic. Others felt that it was personality or organisationally dependent, not post dependent.*

**13. What would increase your role in promoting the use of your evaluations? What are the constraints?**

*52% thought that the evaluators should be involved in some way in follow-up and that this must be budgeted for in the contract and included in the TOR. Flexibility in the TOR to adapt to needs before and during is also important (15%). A variety of individual suggestions were made including greater focus on local organisations, opportunities to return to the field much later as part of a learning process to see which recommendations were useful and not, debriefs being broken up, particularly in the field, so that the teams had time to discuss the first debrief alone and then return for more discussion with the evaluation team. The lack of time for both evaluators and agency staff to engage in participative discussions and follow up is a significant concern. Other concerns (single) included poor motivation and work quality on the part of evaluators (sometimes others in the same team) (commercial approach), the need for a code of practice and greater recognition of the independence of evaluation and finally the need for greater access to the top of the management hierarchy.*

*Constraints to an evaluator's ability to promote utilisation included the lack of an evaluator's time and availability to follow up, problems with poor performance by other evaluators in the team and being regarded as overly critical.*

**14. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on how to promote the use of evaluation?**

*Additional suggestions or comments not otherwise covered above included:*

- *More training of evaluators and agency staff in evaluation methods and objectives with a greater emphasis on use and guidelines, budgets for evaluations, participative approaches*
- *The inclusion of follow-up in tender guidelines*
- *Guidelines on good practice in the detailed processes involved in evaluation (types of interview, length of time on each activity, evaluator selection)*
- *Pre-evaluation field visits by the team leader (e.g. to clarify use and purpose, build relationships)*
- *A code of conduct or ethics for evaluators to protect both clients and evaluators standards and reputation*
- *Evaluators and agencies to learn lessons from communications experts, e.g. to focus on maximum dissemination, identify (five) key points for different key audiences, multiple formats for presentation of findings including web use, blogs etc*
- *Greater pressure on agencies regarding accountability e.g. transparency (publication must be the norm), commitment to performance not media profile, and exposure of agencies for repeated poor performance and lack of use of evaluations*
- *Far clearer differentiation of different types of evaluation, even by using different names.*
- *Demystifying evaluation*