

Did We Do It Right?

Evaluating a Human Rights Film Festival

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Planning an evaluation may not be initially on our radar screen as we set up a human rights film festival, and yet this may be one of our most important actions. An evaluation helps festivals become more effective, avoid making important (often recurrent) mistakes and be accountable to donors, partners and stakeholders. Once the screen goes dark, our next job is to ask ourselves: did we achieve what we set out to do?

An important part of the evaluation can be used to write the festival's final report for donors and partners. In addition, the evaluation will also include many details that need not be in the report but that will help the team improve all aspects of festival planning, execution and post-production. For human rights film festivals this exercise is useful to improve "know how", social impact and outcomes.

A festival's objectives should be in line with identified needs of the local community. These needs should guide a festival's programming, production, accompanying events and the evaluation process, helping us measure its impact.

But how do you go about measuring impact? A film festival that seeks social transformation as one of its objectives may be more difficult to evaluate because there are so many intangibles related to the achievement of these goals, and because these changes do not usually come quickly. That is why it is important to establish some sort of "baseline", a point of departure from which to compare subsequent festivals. In other words, the findings from your first festival evaluation can be used as a benchmark or measuring stick for future evaluations, helping you to gauge the changes produced by each subsequent event. Young festivals may not be able to evaluate their longer-term impact initially, but they can establish clear objectives and actions to attain them and evaluate them from day 1.

There are easily measurable outcomes (for instance audience numbers or participation), but the more desirable long-term outcomes (such as awareness building, the empowerment of a community or the sensitisation of decision makers) are harder to measure and usually require a few years to take hold.

Evaluation is ideally built into festival planning from the start, and it should involve all team members and all activities. All stakeholders (not just the team)

should be included in the evaluation process: partners/funders, audiences, guests, filmmakers, members of the community, human rights organisations, media, etc. Questionnaires or short interviews with participants (audience members, partners, etc.) are effective tools that can help festivals understand the impact they are having. Asking team members to write notes about each day's activities will also help evaluate at the end. If you hold daily coordination meetings, make sure that someone takes detailed notes. These meetings offer a chance to evaluate in real time, identify problems and errors, and correct them.

If the festival is held within a population suffering from human rights violations that the festival is addressing, it may be useful for people to hold town hall-style meetings (informal, participatory community or village discussions) after the event to discuss the event and how it impacted the community.

There are two general types of evaluation

Internal

Conducted by festival team members using a basic "Evaluation Toolkit". You can find some example models in several languages at <http://goo.gl/WJLY1A>. An internal evaluation is less complex. If your organisation does not have experience with this it would be advisable to ask someone with some experience to guide you through the first one.

External

Conducted by external evaluators using methodology and ethical principles, it is very useful for first evaluations, impact evaluations and for projects requiring more serious intervention.

Internal Evaluation

In an internal evaluation process the team shares and builds on collective experiences with the aim of improving each edition of the festival. This is the ideal type of evaluation for the average human rights film festival.

The team must first identify the key goals and objectives (expectations) for the festival and its activities. Then it asks itself several key questions about the festival and about each of the activities. What was the initial objective? Was it met? What worked and why? What did not work and why? What lessons can we draw from our experience and how can we improve for the next time?

SWOT Analysis

Many projects like One World conduct a SWOT analysis with core team members. It is a useful tool that identifies:

- Strengths (internal factors)
- Weaknesses (internal factors)
- Opportunities (external factors)
- Threats (external factors)

For example, at One World FF they usually do SWOT analysis 1-2 months after the festival, once they collect and analyse feedback from the audience (who fill in online questionnaires), guests, volunteers and festival partners. They usually gather the core festival team (10–15 people) from all festival sections (programming, production, PR, outreach, financial, etc.) and together identify what worked well (strengths), what went wrong (weaknesses), what could be done in the future (opportunities) and what things endanger the festival (threats). They are very open during discussions and try not to take criticism personally. The analysis is always written down, including main conclusions, and it is the basis for the planning of next festival edition.

After Action Review (AAR)

Many human rights/development/humanitarian aid organisations that work in the field use a method called After Action Review (AAR), a team discussion held shortly after the action has ended and when memories are still very fresh. This approach can also work well for a human rights film festival. Ideally, it should be done within one or two weeks of the festival.

Because AARs are held shortly after an event is held, the team will probably still lack a lot of information about the exact outcome(s). For instance, media coverage may be ongoing and not yet fully compiled; questionnaires may not have been processed and computed, and analysis on audience

numbers or participation may still be incomplete. Of course, the more information the team can bring to the table, the better the AAR will be, but the real value of AARs is that they help record the event almost in real time.

Participants can vary depending on the size of your team: if it is very large, you might want to include one or two representatives from each section (production, guests, programming, debates, etc.) in order to facilitate the process, whereas if the team is not too large, everyone can participate. FiSahara's AARs usually involve about 15–20 people.

AARs are dynamic group discussions, and are best held with the aid of an external person who facilitates dialogue and writes the key information on a flipchart. AAR sessions posit basic questions to help orient and focus discussion.

It is important to stress that this exercise should be constructive: rather than identifying who is to blame for an error, the error itself should be identified so it can be avoided in the future.

FiSahara's 2014 edition benefitted from key recommendations from its two previous AARs. These included significant improvements in its human rights film workshop; better on-the-ground coordination with local actors prior to the festival; improved scheduling for all activities; a better balance between human rights and entertainment

programming; the prioritisation of some key partnerships; significant reduction in health risks for visitors; and improved coordination of all aspects of the trip to the camps.

AAR in Practice

AAR is a simple but powerful tool that helps improve the organisational learning that teams require. AAR helps to assess our performance and identify and learn from successes and failures. Furthermore, sharing the results of AAR can help future teams learn about your successful strategies and avoid the obstacles that you have worked to overcome.

AAR is a tool that permits us:

- An open and honest professional discussion
- Participation by everyone on the team
- A focus on results of an event or project
- Identification of ways to sustain what was done well
- Development of recommendations on ways to overcome obstacles

AAR is centered on four questions:

- What was expected to happen during our film festival?
- What actually occurred?
- What went well and why?
- What can be improved and how?

Each part of the team replies to all questions and shares results with other areas. In order to distill important information and be more efficient, ask team

members to reflect on their experience and note down their key points (and answers to the four questions) before the AAR takes place. Try to focus on the larger picture and leave small details out of the discussion to avoid a drawn out discussion. Some people like to write basic ideas down and distribute them among their colleagues during the meeting.

How to Use AAR:

- Hold the AAR immediately or as soon as possible, while team members are still fresh from their experience.
- Create the right climate. Make sure that the atmosphere is relaxed: some organisations order pizza or other food, take short coffee breaks to ease tension or make plans to go out as a group afterwards. There should be a consensus among participants that the sole purpose of an AAR is collective learning. AARs use a similar strategy to brainstorming sessions: participants leave seniority and rank at the door, participate in an open discussion free of judgment, and are committed to learning from each other. These sessions are not meant to evaluate individual performance.
- Choose a facilitator. This person is there to guide the discussion, facilitate learning and write down key points to be recorded. Depending on the nature of the festival, the facilitator will break the event down into its separate activities, each with its own objective and plan of action to be evaluated in turn. The AAR begins with the first activity, repeating all four basic questions for each one.



Evaluation group at FiSahara, Dakhla refugee camp. Photo: Archive of FiSahara.

- Ask “What was expected to happen?” The group talks about the activity’s initial objective(s) and plan of action. For instance, for a human rights film screening and debate, discuss what your objectives and expectations were, and your proposed plan to carry them out.
- Ask “What actually occurred?” Participants discuss the event as it happened, looking both at positives and negatives. Here the team must objectively review the event as it took place.
- Compare initial objectives and action plan with what took place. This is where valuable lessons are drawn. On the one hand the team identifies what was successful and why. On the other, it also looks at what went wrong and why. It is important not to just ask yourselves whether the objective was achieved but also, whenever necessary, to review whether the objective was realistic in the first place, and whether it needs to be modified.

For instance, perhaps the theme of a film was very relevant to the audience, but the movie itself did not connect with viewers. Why? Did it use appropriate cinematographic language for your target audience? Were they sufficiently prepared to process the information? Is the audience ready for this type of film?

Once these comparisons (between expected and actual results) have been discussed, the team can modify its action plans (even possibly some of its objectives) to strengthen successes and correct mistakes for the future.

Record and share the key points. Taking notes and reporting on the AAR to the entire team helps document successes and failures, facilitates the sharing of knowledge, encourages group learning and enables the organisation as a whole to build on lessons learned.

Resources and Time

AARs can be used in two ways.

- Formal AARs are ideally conducted with a facilitator.
- Spontaneous or informal AARs can be led by a member of the project team.

The time required to conduct an AAR varies and often depends on the time your team can allot. AARs usually take between half a day and a complete day, especially for festivals with multiple activities.

What Do Donors Expect from Us?

Accountability and transparency are key parts of evaluations. Donors often have their own evaluation requests. Some of their questions will ask for quantitative data such as global audience participation, gender breakdown (both of audience and guest participants), number of events held, etc. Be ready to document this data for your evaluation; before the festival you should identify members of your team who can record this information. Donors may ask you for audience/guest reaction, media coverage and impact on the community (intended and unintended).

Some Examples of Indicators

- Number of attendees (global, broken down by activity)
- Number of participants (guest filmmakers, speakers, etc.) and their diversity (gender, culture, ethnicity, occupation, focus, etc.)
- Acceptance and support on the part of like-minded organisations (human rights defenders, etc.) toward the festival
- Implication/ownership of local community towards festival (volunteers, citizen participation, local institutional support, local businesses, etc.)
- Acceptance towards programming (audience reaction, audience participation in debates, poll answers, etc.)
- Audience gender balance
- Audience diversity
- Media coverage
- Impact on decision-makers, if targeted
- Impact on human rights community
- Cost of festival (economic, material, human) vis-à-vis results
- Collateral benefits (for example, local initiatives arising from participation in the festival)

We must also be watchful to identify both the positive and negative unintended/unplanned consequences of our festivals. This includes environmental, social and economic impact. For instance, does the festival spark new initiatives in the community? Does it bring additional income to local families/businesses? Does it generate

trash, and how is that trash disposed of? Does it lead to the production of new film projects? Does it put participants or community members in danger? Does it generate a backlash from conservatives or other groups?

Evaluating unplanned impact is particularly important when festivals are held in communities new to these types of events. FiSahara, held in the Sahrawi refugee camps, has an enormous effect on Dakhla, the most remote of the camps. For one week, this refugee camp is transformed from a sleepy community deep in the Sahara Desert to an international event, hosting hundreds of visitors from many countries. How do these hundreds of people impact life in the camp? Are they respectful of local customs? Do they go home and work on the Sahrawi cause? Do they stay in touch with their families? Start a project? Vendors, artisans and other family businesses descend on festival grounds and dozens of pop-up restaurants emerge. What does that mean for these families' economies? Are resources well distributed? How does Dakhla recover from those days?

A defining characteristic of evaluations is that the results are used to make decisions, improve activities, achieve outcomes or results and draw on lessons learned. These findings always help us to improve our project.

External Evaluation

An external evaluation is needed if a festival needs a more radical change; for instance, if its impact is very

unclear, if it is not sustainable, if its objectives are not being sufficiently met or if its goals or organisation need radical change and the team's internal evaluation cannot identify a course of action. External evaluations can be expensive, but their advantage is that evaluators are more objective than team members and employ effective (and more complex) methodologies that identify key problems and recommendations.

In 2012 and after eight editions, FiSahara needed to evaluate organisational structure, programming and impact and rebuild its funding sources. While its main funder, the Spanish government, had discontinued support due to the global financial crisis, FiSahara also needed to ascertain how to best meet its objectives, which include empowering Sahrawi people through film and raising international awareness on the Western Sahara, a forgotten conflict.

The Dimes Foundation, which already works in the Sahrawi refugee camps, offered economic support if the festival agreed to an external evaluation. The evaluation of FiSahara's 2012 edition clearly stated that the project's overall impact on was positive but it identified some problems in organisational structure, team coordination and film programming, as well as an urgent need to internationalise its activities, partnerships and financing.

As a result, FiSahara made important changes that have helped the festival significantly improve its impact, outreach and sustainability. These include re-structuring its

core team; internationalising its outreach and partnerships; strengthening its human rights-related activities through films, guests and partnerships with key organisations (Movies that Matter, HRFN, WITNESS and many others); programming more films in Arabic; including a strong gender component through partnerships with local women's groups and women-centered screenings and events; searching for international funders and, most importantly, evaluating impact on a constant basis.

External evaluation parameters and objectives

The main purpose of an external evaluation is to assess the festival's relevance, its impact and sustainability. It proposes a series of recommendations on model, performance, management and progress in defining and proposing alternatives.

The principles that guide the evaluations must be:

- Objectivity
- Independence of the evaluation team
- Participation of affected people in the whole process
- Transparency and focus
- Understandability
- Completeness and clarity of reports
- Justice and protecting the interests of participants
- Usefulness

Summary

Evaluation Criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability

Relevance: the extent to which our festival is tailored to the priorities and policies of the people, institutions, the general public and donors. In assessing the relevance, consider the following questions:

- To what extent the objectives are valid?
- Are the activities and results of the festival in line with the objective general and the achievement of its objectives?
- Are the activities and results consistent with the expected impact and effects?

For example, FiSahara had to deal with these very tough questions in its 2012 external evaluation. The evaluators agreed that the festival's main objectives—entertaining and forming Sahrawis through film and raising international awareness on the Western Sahara—were extremely relevant, but found that after nine editions these objectives were only partially being met, diminishing the festival's relevance.

For instance, even though the festival had become the single most important cultural event in the camps, many Sahrawis in the audience thought that films were mostly selected for international visitors. Many did not attend screenings because they did not understand or connect with films, which were selected according to criteria (such as whether a movie had won awards and would be accompanied at the festival by a filmmaker or star to give it more visibility) that were sometimes not in line with needs and tastes of main beneficiaries. Most films were not in Arabic

or Hassanya, the local Arabic dialect, making it difficult for the audience to understand and connect with them. Many in attendance were there to enjoy the social event, not the films. Additionally, women were not largely present in many screenings either because of schedule conflicts or because some films were not considered appropriate for mixed audiences.

In addition, the evaluation detected the need to expand festival objectives to include a wider-reaching objective of empowering the Sahrawi people through film by creating a human rights section (films and roundtables), offering human rights video and film trainings to Sahrawis from the camps and the occupied territory and forging partnerships with other human rights film festivals. By doing so, the festival has become more relevant to Sahrawis in the camps, but also to Sahrawis living under occupation in the Western Sahara, who suffer from daily human rights abuses.

Effectiveness: The extent to which our festival reaches its objectives. In assessing the effectiveness, it is useful to consider the following questions, which are the basis of evaluating:

- To what extent were the objectives achieved or are likely to be achieved?
- What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of objectives?

In 2012, external evaluators found that while FiSahara was partially meeting its main objectives—providing



Festival meeting at FiSahara, Dakhla refugee camp. Photo: Archive of FiSahara.

entertainment and training to Sahrawis through film and raising international awareness about the Western Sahara—it could reach them more fully by programming to fit local tastes and conducting international outreach.

Factors that now help achieve these objectives include working in partnership with local organisations in all aspects of programming and FiSahara’s ongoing human rights work in conjunction with key international partners.

Efficiency: This means measuring results—qualitatively and quantitatively—in relation to the resources (economic, material, human) invested. Efficiency is an economic term meaning that the least costly resources are employed to achieve the desired results. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs in order to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted. In assessing the effectiveness of our project, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- Is the festival managed in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?
- Were each of the activities cost-efficient?
- Were the objectives achieved in the time allotted?

For example, the production of FiSahara takes up a large amount of hard-to-obtain financial resources, as well as a vast quantity of material and human resources. In the context of a refugee camp lacking basic ser-

vices and with pressing needs of all kinds, FiSahara has an extra duty to operate in the most efficient way possible. In order to evaluate its efficiency FiSahara looks at:

- The results obtained for each activity versus the resources devoted to the activity. What was obtained from a workshop and was it worth the money invested in bringing in facilitators and workshop materials? Do all screenings have sufficient attendance, considering how much time and resources are devoted to obtaining and subtitling (if necessary) the films?
- Whether each activity employs the most cost-effective option. For instance, was it worthwhile inviting a guest whose flight costs 2–3 times more than another guest’s? If so, what were the results of this added expense and were they worth it?
- Whether each activity is effective in the time and place dedicated to it. For instance, in 2013 FiSahara conducted its first human rights film workshop in Dakhla during the festival, which lasted 4 days. While the workshop was extremely relevant to beneficiaries, we concluded that time was too short for the amount of resources used and that the workshop needed more materials and infrastructure (it lacked sufficient cameras and computers, electricity was intermittent and Internet access was non-existent). In 2014, the workshop was lengthened to 3 weeks, was mostly held at the film school and there were more cameras and computers; as a result, the participants learned substantially more. Costs for the workshop were similar both years, but the 2014 results were far superior.

Impact: These are the positive and negative changes produced by the festival, directly or indirectly, intentionally or not. This looks at the resulting effects, incidence and activity indicators in local social, economic, environmental and other spheres. The analysis should differentiate between intended and unintended results and must also include the positive and negative impact of external factors.

For example, does the festival lead to heightened consciousness on human rights? (intended, positive). Has it generated local income? (unintended, positive). Do the activities lead to repression or prohibitions against participants? (unintended, negative).

In assessing the impact, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- What has happened as a result of the festival?
- What is the real difference that the project brings to beneficiaries?
- How many people have been affected by the activities of the festival?

As this chapter has explained, impact can be measured quantitatively (number of attendees, screenings, gender/age breakdowns, etc.), but it is the qualitative aspect of impact that can be most interesting for a human rights festival: whether minds are changed or key tools and knowledge transferred. Each festival will adopt different methods to measure this impact, depending on its objectives, types of audiences (and

availability of the audiences to respond to questions), etc. Some qualitative results (change in attitude, increased awareness, the adoption of effective organising tools) usually take years to materialise.

For FiSahara, both types of impact are difficult to measure. Methods used include head counts (some very informal), observations by team members (in screenings, roundtables and workshops), questionnaires and interviews with participants (audience, guests, workshop facilitators and beneficiaries, merchants, local families, etc.), interviews with local organisations (to determine impact in the camp), output (for example videos produced during workshops) and evaluation meetings with counterpart and key organisations.

Local audience questionnaires are simple and conducted during the festival. After obtaining basic data on the interviewees, questions center on their festival experience: how many years they have attended, which activities they have attended, which they prefer, what types of films they have seen, which they like best, which they would like to see, whether they believe that FiSahara is important to their community, etc.

In a refugee camp of 15,000 residents with open spaces, people constantly coming and going and multiple activities (most of them outdoors), coming up with realistic numbers can be particularly challenging. Numbers for workshop participants and indoor



Working meetings at FFDH in Geneva. Photo by Miguel Bueno.

screenings are easiest, but for outdoor activities, some widely dispersed, they are next to impossible. In 2014 the governor of the Dakhla refugee camp decided to conduct a comprehensive consultation with residents, to be followed by town meetings with FiSahara team members. This process aims to identify both positive and negative and intended and unintended impact.

Sustainability: This deals with measuring the benefits of the festival and the likelihood that they will continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. The festival also must be environmentally and financially sustainable.

In assessing sustainability, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- To what extent will the film festival's income continue after current donor funding has ceased? (Here also we look at activities to bring new donors and sources of income before present donors leave the project).
- What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability for the festival?

Human rights film festivals will always need outside donors. But as we see in the fundraising chapter of this handbook, practically none are permanent. Thus, evaluating the sustainability of a festival includes looking at whether the festival organisers are resourceful and strategic not just in procuring financing for the present, but also in guaranteeing it for the future.

Evaluating sustainability includes taking a hard look at festival budgets—income versus costs—and figuring out whether our expenditure plans (and thus our programme) are realistic for the present and the future. It is easier to start small and grow slowly but with firm footing, as the festival picks up support, than to start big because of a windfall from a major funder and then have to massively scale back once that funder disappears. This has happened to many events, including FiSahara, which abruptly lost all its Spanish government grant funding in 2012 due to Spain's drastic reduction in international aid at the height of the global financial crisis. As it rebuilds its finances and evaluates costs and sustainability, FiSahara has also scaled back on high-cost items, like funding trips for dozens of attending film stars, focusing on a few priority people. Now, many of these stars pay their own way, or do not come.

Theory of Change

Theory of Change is a tool that helps plan, strategise and evaluate projects. It is used by numerous organisations that focus on producing social change in sectors such as education, human rights, international development and sustainability, and it could also prove useful for human rights film festivals.

Some organisations working with film are using Theory of Change to improve impact. One example is the Impact Field Guide Toolkit for filmmakers and film projects currently being developed by Britdoc, the Bertha Foundation, the Ford Foundation and Sundance, with the

aid of the New Citizenship Project, a group of creative strategists. Drawing on Theory of Change, and using case studies of films that have been especially effective at generating impact, this guide helps filmmakers and film teams define their vision, plan their strategy and deliver an effective campaign for their film projects. The toolkit can be found at <http://impactguide.org/>

The methodology offered by Theory of Change helps plan project evaluations by providing the building blocks necessary for project to achieve its long-term goal or goals. It then guides projects in identifying what to evaluate and when. Theory of Change provides a clear roadmap for strategic planning, decision-making and evaluation.

When employing Theory of Change organisations go through six steps:

- Identifying long-term goals (defining desired outcome(s) and pre-conditions to achieve the outcome(s))
- Backwards mapping and connecting outcomes (mapping the process that will lead to desired change)
- Completing the outcomes framework (identifying the necessary pre-conditions for the project to work)
- Identifying assumptions (these assumptions, if correct, make the outcome achievable)
- Developing indicators (identifying how to measure the implementation and effectiveness of the project)
- Identifying interventions (defining the actions that will bring about the desired change)

For more on Theory of Change and how it works: <http://www.theoryofchange.org/>

Sharing our Findings

The most important aspect of the evaluation process is to share the results and act on recommendations. The findings and recommendations should be shared with the festival team, partners and stakeholders in a Final Report (for a Final Report example from One World, visit: <http://goo.gl/8c1CkO>).

You can also find a Final Report guide in our fundraising chapter of this manual. But Final Reports are not enough. Findings should also be discussed in a participatory team workshop. Whether you can convene the team depends on members' availability during the off-season. If meeting physically is impossible, you can use knowledge-sharing tools such as Google docs, a group portal like Zoho Wiki, video-conference sessions or a closed Facebook group. At FiSahara, the team convenes after the Final Report and before the next festival planning to discuss lessons learned and design a plan of action. Feedback in this process is necessary to have a complete overview of the entire evaluation process and implement lessons learned.

The first evaluation establishes clear baselines that can be used to compare subsequent festivals. After a few editions, measuring significant (longer term) impact becomes more feasible.

Main Tips

- Decide which kind of evaluation your festival needs: internal or external.
- Start planning the evaluation from the early stages by identifying what you will evaluate, the methods you will use and who in the team is responsible for what.
- Include all team members and stakeholders in the evaluation process and make sure they understand the purpose and steps to follow.
- Define methods for obtaining information about all events and from all stakeholders (questionnaires, interviews, head counts, etc.).
- Conduct a baseline evaluation that will serve as comparison for future ones.
- Make sure you are clear about key goals and objectives of your festival and the methods to achieve them so you can compare your expectations with the actual results.
- Record events as they happen.
- Follow the key evaluation principles.
- In the evaluation process include intended and unintended impact as well as positive and negative.
- Do a SWOT analysis with your team to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Conduct an After Action Review (AAR) meeting with the team as soon as the festival is over. If possible, include an outside person to facilitate an open discussion, free of hierarchies and judgment, and to record results.
- Use your evaluation process as a collective learning tool to identify what works and what needs to be changed.
- Write a Final Report for all partners and funders that includes main findings and recommendations from the evaluation.
- Share the Final Report and evaluation findings with all stakeholders and with your team.
- Conduct a follow-up meeting with your team once the report is written to prepare an action plan for the next event.