



Measuring Program Impact

This paper details the impact dimension of UBORA, CARE USA's global organizational performance and learning system. Impact is one of three dimensions of good performance which also include: program support, (effective and efficient management of key resources and operations in ways that contribute to program strategy and impact), and program process (incorporation of program principles, adherence to standards, and contribution to desired impacts).

Recognizing that impact measurement is a crucial component of UBORA, and will require different measurement processes than the rest of the system, this paper:

- a) Defines impact for the purposes of UBORA
- b) Discusses the differences in measurement between projects and programs
- c) Proposes a coherent and logical system for capturing both immediate outcomes and long-term impacts over time
- d) Discusses the challenge of impact indicators and presents agreements resulting from the "Programmatic Shift Workshop" (2-9 April 2008, Istanbul) on the use of impact indicators by the learning labs.

Defining Impact

CARE needs a shared understanding of impact in order to have effective and credible impact measurement:

Long-term and sustainable social change that happens at systemic and structural levels and addresses underlying causes of poverty for a specified group of marginalized and vulnerable people.

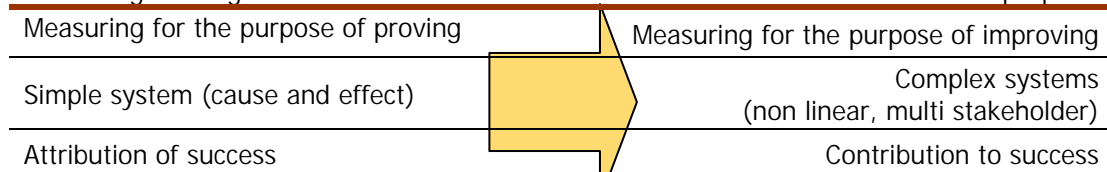
Improvements in human conditions outcomes such as nutrition, income, food production/access, HIV transmission prevented, are temporary without changes in power relations and structures. As we learn from the learning labs, we will need to be increasingly clear about the critical indicators of deep and lasting change beyond those that measure human condition.

Measuring Impact

We need to improve greatly our project, non-project, and program impact measurement. Experience across CARE in design, monitoring and evaluation (DM&E) shows problems at two levels: adhering to current DME standards; and the degree to which current DM&E systems actually advance the organization in improving impact as defined above. We need to do two things: adhere more consistently and with greater accountability at project level to known, agreed norms and standards and create a feasible measurement and information system adept at capturing impacts.

The change that is required

The strategic change needed is to rethink what needs to be measured and for what purpose.



From: "Measuring Success: What's New, What's Next?", Sprenger, Ellen (2006).

Project M&E vs. Program Impact Measurement

Traditional monitoring and evaluation is project focused. Project level M&E systems that track activities and outputs have to be maintained and indeed strengthened, albeit in more streamlined and focused ways, to

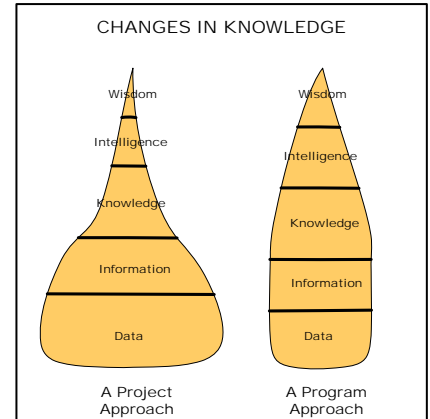


meet our accountability and stewardship responsibilities. Beyond project M&E, we require program impact measurement systems that aggregate project level monitoring and evaluation and non-project results. These systems assume that program strategies are based on hypotheses that need to be tested and that projects serve this broader purpose, rather than being aimed solely at achieving their specific objectives.

Short-comings of the present DM&E system

The typical DM&E system, created for individual project cycle management, is based on logical frameworks and the agreed indicators for reporting on activities, outputs and results. Typical systems in CARE tend to:

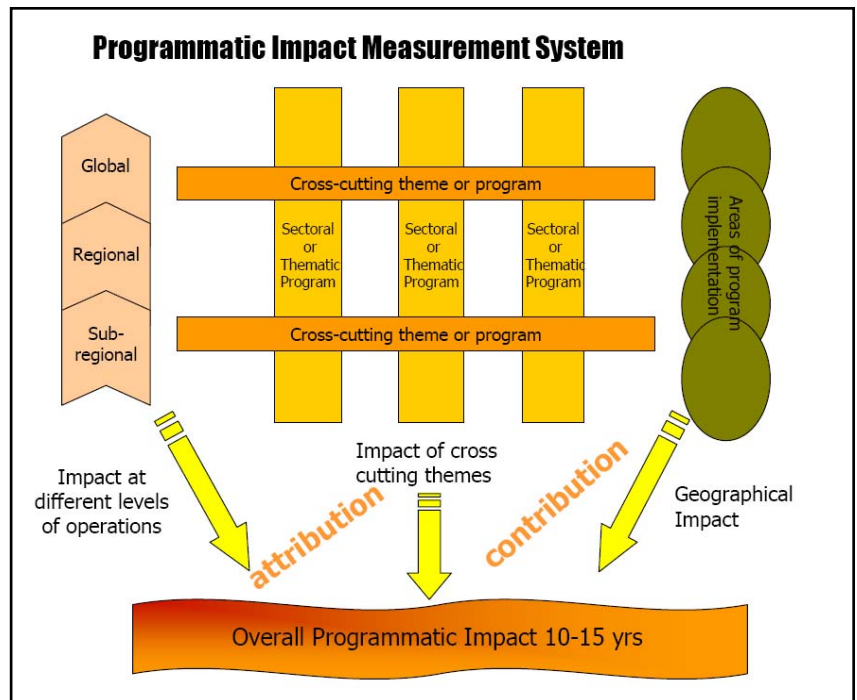
- Be quantitative and geared to meeting donor targets, with data seldom used beyond donor reporting.
- Generate a surfeit of data without clear purpose, use, or audience, much of which is never analyzed.
- Engage in single loop learning that treats the project objectives and hypotheses as given and examines only the efficacy of specific methods designed to achieve these.
- Focus on data not conducive to understanding social change processes.
- Treat monitoring & evaluation tasks as 'events', rather than as iterative processes, with time slots and a tendency to contract out, creating a lack of ownership by the project team.
- Be good at measuring outputs and outcomes, with little understanding of why changes occurred, assuming that it is related to the interventions.
- Lack rigor in data collection methods or evaluation designs, creating issues of replicability or external validity.



Impact Measurement System

If UBORA is to measure our impact as a component of good performance, new impact measurement systems need to be established around each long-term program area and for the amalgamation of the business unit (i.e., Country Office).

- Over time project DM&E systems will align with the program impact measurement system. They will link with longer-term, more strategic program level indicators, analyses, baselines, and impact studies. They will gradually adopt similar outcome and impact indicator categories, producing comparable and aggregable data.
- Program-level measurement systems – systems that look deeply at underlying causes -- will place more emphasis on knowledge and less on information generation. They will provide insights into *how* and *why* a change occurred and not simply *what* change. Thriftiness and strategic focus is the key. Program impact measurement systems will be shaped by what data are necessary, for whom they are valuable, what purpose they serve, and how they will change what we do.





- CARE's information systems will be designed to report on impacts and outcomes/effects through routine reflection processes and systems for more standardized information.
- Information will be both qualitative, seeking to understand aspects such as changes in power relations, as well as quantitative.
- Learning processes and systems will facilitate the conversion of monitoring and evaluation information to knowledge that can be shared within CARE and a wide range of stakeholders.
- Over time, program impact measurement systems will be linked to regional and global measurement systems that cut across CI Member lines.

Key Elements

The key elements of this impact measurement system would need to be:

- Measurement across long periods of time (10-15 years) rather than over project life cycles.
- Measurement beyond the output and outcome level to the impact level.
- Measurement across both project and non-project activities (program initiatives).
- Measurement of cross-cutting themes as well as main program foci (i.e., governance as well as health).
- Measurement of outcomes and impacts across at least a minimum set of internally consistent and externally comparable indicators.
- Measurement, if feasible, of both CARE's attribution as well as contribution to desired outcomes and impacts.
- Measurement that allows the testing of the social change hypothesis rather than just verifying outcomes.

Indicators

In LAC, the argument has been made and demonstrated (particularly by Peru and Ecuador), that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide alignment with national goals and are critical in creating a shared platform for discourse at national advocacy level. In order to engage coherently and effectively with wider policy stakeholders, such as national governments, bi-lateral or multi-lateral donors or international finance institutions, it is very useful to have arguments coached and aligned with MDG objectives and targets. Measuring the MDIs also means contributing to international analyses of the MDGs.

The LAC countries provide an example of how to adapt and augment the MDIs (Millennium Development Indicators) by targeting marginalized and excluded groups, and especially women and girls within these, to address 'missing' aspects of the unifying framework. Using, or at least incorporating the MDGs, is shown to offer real benefits of a common language across the organization, improved global communications with external actors and a means to tell a more coherent story of CARE's overall global impact. In addition, the learning from impact indicators on social position or enabling environment will also allow CARE to challenge conventional approaches to poverty and social justice. Thus, we have an opportunity to establish an impact system with an important message to other actors in the development industry as we seek to demonstrate where the limitations of existing global systems are in assessing change in people's lives.

Selection of MDI+ Indicators

The selection of the possible MDIs and additional social position and enabling environment indicators will be done by testing a draft list of indicators in learning labs by:

- Selecting the marginalized and excluded population groups to target for the MDI;
- Adjusting the ratios and numbers of the MDI to apply to the target groups;
- Developing guidance on the methods and process for measurement and analysis.

Learning labs will then test the impact measurement component of Ubora, with the intent that their experience will help hone the process for the rest of the organization.