

Best Practices and Challenges in Building M&E Capacity of Local Governments

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Best Practices and Challenges in Building M&E Capacity of Local Governments – Panel

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Richard Columbia, Regional Evaluation Advisor, UN Population Fund

Richard Columbia:

Hi, I'm Richard Columbia, representing the UN Population Fund, a set of one of the UN Agencies. I think that the – looking back over the last two and a half days that three issues really sort of lept out at me as being really quite important in my work that involved – I think the first one that came out was that – looking at M&E capacity development really needs to apply the same rigors that we apply to developing in general.

I think in the past M&E has always been on the side of developments, a thought afterwards, but now that it's becoming much more mainstream I think that the same rigors in terms of capacity development being demand-driven, needing to create a culture of M&E and evidence-based advocacy policy, decision-making, the participatory approach to M&E and then certainly looking at the attention given to both the quality of the data which we've always done, but now looking at the utilization much more broadly than we had in the past.

I think also one that is sort of the take-away messages for me is that we need to evaluate the M&E work that we're doing, I think – I'm certainly not talking about myself but in the past I've often done M&E thinking that I was exempt from needing to take a look at the relevance of what I was doing, looking at the effectiveness, looking at the efficiency, looking at sustainability,

potentially of long-term impact. I think this group made it very clear that that's something that now we're being held accountable for.

I think the other exciting, the second exciting element that was discussed is this whole idea of equity evaluation or equity disaggregation of data, and I think that a number of speakers raised this in many different contexts but I think Susan's presentation brought it home really very well; is that depending on what you're looking at, whether that's a regional level or a country level – that bringing it down to the next level often is important.

So if you're looking regionally we need to look at variations by countries. If you're at the national level you're going to need to look at variations at the state level and then once you've done that then there is potential inequities within that; age, ethnicity, sex, geographic location, and I think that came across really well as something that we need to do with our national counterparts as something that we can – we can stress.

I think then the last pieces is the whole idea of the data utilization. I think then that I've been doing this for about 30 years now and I think that I've learned an awful lot in that time and really very quite recently in terms of the importance of the utilization and the planning for that, right up front, with coming up with either the project design or the M&E plan. And I think that that includes understanding who needs the data; what data is needed and what format and the timing of that as well as looking at advocacy or evidence-based advocacy for policy or programming, using that data for decision-making, and then I think also then for learning, I think

that the – the last came from Tom, although many of us have talked about it is the whole idea that sometimes you need to create the culture for this.

So we have the – you have the standing, you're building the culture for M&E but I think it's also then building the culture for evidence-based decision and evidence-based programming. Thank you.

Romeo Santos:

Oka. Good afternoon, I'm Romeo Santos. I'm teaching in the University of the Philippines. The story the – in this you have the WorkLand Institut. And the WorkLand Institute is an M&E institute, it's actually a non-profit organization that my colleagues and I have formed so that we could pursue our advocacy of building capacity of M&E in many sectors of society in the Philippines and I only got here today, sorry for that, so maybe my reaction would be just touching on the things that I've heard this morning and the proceedings this morning.

But I read through the proceedings yesterday that I heard so now actually I'm lost. What questions should I answer? But I would like to take off from what Richard mentioned a while ago regarding we have to evaluate our M&E and the way we do that now. Why do we have to evaluate as well our M&E? M&E is evaluation, right, monitoring and evaluation.

Because if you link that with the issue of how we build capacity in local governments in comparison with the community-based organizations we can see how we connect the dots. I would like to say that M&E is a developing, emerging process. Although in the past we have been doing M&E.

Right now there are a lot of schools of thought – concepts coming up.

Every now and then people who are thinkers who come up with ideas what is M&E all about and our question would be what would come after this and how do we say whether this M&E practice or approach is for everyone or it is a – the best practice? Although personally I am apprehensive of using the word, ‘best practice,’ and that’s part of it actually, the emergence of different schools of thought; for example, look at how we use the word, for example, ‘inclusiveness,’ in our thought. The word ‘inclusiveness’ or, ‘inclusive,’ the word, ‘empowerment,’ the word, ‘leverage,’ the word, ‘capacitate,’ all of these are found in the field of development.

What I want to point out is that there are a lot of things that we don’t agree on or agree but we don’t have good sense about the meaning. The – the M&E’s that there a lot of distinct approaches, a lot of concepts that we may not agree with each other in using, but still we practice M&E. How do we even measure this better?

So ___ _____ how would NGOs or community-based organizations, sift through these many ideas and then apply this in their own study. I think that would be a challenge but we have to look at – or to place ourselves in a practice of M&E.

But still I think one of the best – one of the best criteria that we could use I think is how logical the development of the idea is or are they trying. For example there are a lot of people saying, okay, this is the theory of change, this is the

theory of action. There is an M&E system for example, the whole system itself is very much used, very much used but what kind of a ____
____ the same system?

____ _____ was a report of the World Bank saying that the existing systems are so and so and so whereas there is no system at all. So relating that to what Richard mentioned about evaluating our M&E systems. It would be very difficult, this would be shared by – even NGOs and community-based organizations, determining which is which, which data but still of course our – the consolation is that we agree that M&E is still emerging.

Somewhere along the way there will be kind of equalizing perhaps but that is normal in any development of – in any occasion.

Maura Barry:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Maura Barry. I am one of those who has been sitting in the cheap seats in the back the last two days and thank you very much for this opportunity to talk to the microphone because I've been pretty quiet.

I work here at RDMA as a Regional Advisor for local capacity development. So it's really been fascinating listening to the discussions yesterday and today, and I have a question for the group because I really – you know – listening to Richard and to Romeo, you know, listening to your comments which are so pertinent, I just – as I sit up here I wonder, well how much of us actually have experience building the M&E capacities of our government counterparts. So I'd just like to see a show of hands how many of us in the room have been engaged in directly

building the M&E capacity of the systems of our government counterparts?

So quite a few in the room, that's exciting to see. I'd say that USAID has less experience in that. We probably have the most experience through our systems strengthening in the health sector but – and also some of our colleagues like in Pakistan probably have emerging experience, I would say, in the work that we do.

I mean we've been hearing over the last – yesterday and today how M&E, we recognize it's really at the core of – and the center of sound governance. To make – it's really necessary for making evidence-based decision-making for government on budgets, on management, on accountability, but it's only valuable if it can be utilized intensively and it's all about – and having a model, one of our guests today and we were talking about policy – there is no best model.

The best model is a localized model. The best model is the model that results in decision-making that allows government or civil society to make decisions and make change.

And it's also, you know, the model, you know, it made me think about – because my background is in governance and civil society, you know, what the relationship between the two, so looking at the discussion this morning and the discussion this afternoon between governance and civil society and, you know, what are the M&E systems in place for triangulating the accountability issue of government keeping itself accountable within its various ministries, of civil society holding government accountable; of

government holding private sector and civil society accountable.

And what are the M&E tools we use in those circumstances, and you know I have to talk about USAID Forward which was mentioned earlier by one of my colleagues because it's really been – for those of you who are not familiar with USAID Forward term it's USAID's reforms that we have embarked upon, a couple of years back reflecting the aid effectiveness agenda that was laid out in the Paris Declaration, and later meetings in Akcra and Ghana, but you know that – that's really why we're sitting here today and talking about monitoring and evaluation, recognizing that need to strengthen it. So it's great that we're sitting here and learning and sharing with each other.

And another piece of that reform that I've been very much engaged on is how we work more directly with our local partners and our government counterparts, and so through that experience we've engaged a lot more working directly with governments. You know in the past, in the 90's, USAID had a long experience with getting budget support.

We had some challenges with that in terms of accountability, so now under USAID Forward we used to, particularly in the 90's call it Sector Program Assistance which was budget support. Now we refer to it as G2G and we have now attached a much bigger priority to strengthening the capacity of those institutions that we're targeting. So we have a strong emphasis on capacity-building and we've really focused a lot on public financial management and strengthening those systems.

And I would like to, you know, talking to colleagues who engaged a lot in that area when we look at system strengthening, you know, monitoring evaluation is part of the system, so how do we strengthen that system, and for the PMF what we've really learned is the more that we can utilize the systems that are in place and not try to introduce new systems but use new systems but use the government systems, if even if they're weak, but to grow with it, provide the technical assistance, and improve those systems that, utilizing the systems themselves, as was referenced this morning in another context, but utilizing those systems themselves is a capacity-builder, and the end result is going to have much more ownership and longer sustainability.

One case study I'd like to reference, right, I think we've had as an Agency some good experiences, some more of you did in Rwanda, which is also in the agricultural sector. So it's interesting that the two presentations today were on agriculture and we heard yesterday about how agriculture is a good measure in society of poverty reduction, and I have one minute, okay, so I won't be able to talk much about this.

Let me just say that our work with Rwanda government. They had an indicator which was looking at the percent of arable land with soil erosion protection measures and they were reporting that 80 percent of their land was – was improving soil erosion. They were using the protection measures. But all you had to do is drive around the countryside to see that that was impossible.

So rather though for USAID and other stakeholders, and other donors in private sector

and civil society rather than to tell the government to throw that indicator out the window, we spent a lot of effort looking at that indicator and how the measurements were put in place; discovered how farmers who had maybe one hectare but were planting one tree were reporting that they were using the measures, resulted in, you know, a better understanding and a better ability to use that indicator more effectively.

So just throwing that out there as an example that has worked for us, and I guess the message here is just really – we’ve heard it yesterday, we’ve heard it today, we’ve heard it from two previous speakers was, you know, let’s look at what’s there, let’s modify, let’s not reinvent systems, and let’s use the systems that are there.

Even if they’re not good, they’re – they could be good enough and let’s see where we can go but, also, one question that I wanted to ask yesterday, and again today and I didn’t get to as I throw it out there is just, you know, having a discussion about how much we take advantage of the opportunity. I’ll stop right there – But just the whole opportunity of work – when we’re working with CBO’s, we’re strengthening in capacity, like we heard about this morning how much are we engaging our local government counterparts in taking advantage of the opportunity to bring them into that train or vice-versa.

So I mean there’s a lot of triangulation that does happen on the ground. There’s a lot more that could happen, so I think it’s great to continue this discussion, to continue sharing and learning

from each other, and then moving forward with the community of practice on M&E. Thank you.

Moderator: You've got about five minutes. Let me just pose the question that I asked before. Let's just quickly show though what do you see as the distinctive qualities of developing the capacity of local government versus local organizations. What do we need to be thinking about that makes it different, if at all? Yes.

Audience Member: Resources.

Moderator: Whether the government has resources to do it, okay. Randy?

Randy: I'd say that in the case of Vietnam it's actually just been a lot of folks working under [inaudible comments].

Moderator: Okay, other comments? Yes.

Audience Member: Centralization.

Moderator: I'm sorry, meaning?

Audience Member: Meaning if there's a ministry, whether the – if it comes down through the administrative levels or flows to administrative, flows to local governments out of paid funds.

Moderator: So we're still on the resources, is that how do the resources flow to support it. Yeah, Melissa? Giving her the microphone is dangerous.

Audience Member: Yeah, I would just say that working with government is something where you have to be cognizant of within a particular field to invest in more objective M&E types of systems, so it's giving you that whole – you know – for better performance, you try it through the information.

- Moderator: So the political will to find the truth in using information. Other comments? Am I missing people? Other things? All right, go ahead.
- Audience Member: I think it's a – it's about culture of – M&E, that you know -- specifically in the government sectors is I know that – you know – they know to give the _____ for the evaluations. They are suffering but they are trying to do some monitoring systems together then they are not even – can do having the good evaluation system in these kind of the things.
- So it's a culture of the evaluations, or a culture of the monitoring and the evaluations. They have to realize – they have to realize the importance of the evaluations so that they can set up this kind of a system.
- Moderator: So understanding what the value of M&E systems are for – in your work. Go ahead.
- Audience Member: On the more technical side is the aggregation and organization.
- Moderator: So, a little bit more?
- Audience Member: Aggregation of data, we have more data coming in, and more data coming in, and you've gotta harmonize it, you have to harmonize systems databases and aggregate so that it's meaningful – and it's another kind of level -- different levels of confirmation.
- Moderator: Absolutely, so we're working with the local organizations that – they have the one project or two projects, right. A Ministry of Health has got 19 projects that they need to be aggregating and harmonizing. It's such a huge issue for them. Other comments? Yes?

- Audience Member: Usually working within the –
- Moderator: All right, go ahead.
- Audience Member: Usually working with the local government is very hard wherein you have it – so there is – and it’s really political will that they will – and always there is some political pressure on them as well. So that is it basically.
- Moderator: Okay, so the political will issue is a huge issue working with the government.
- Audience Member: I think it’s not the issue of the _____ but I guess we have to _____ and in many occasions the government in civil societies, they assist them more on – in provisions that they’ve got through, and many times what we see is only the government’s side, or only the civil society’s side, and we don’t have the whole picture of what’s happening in that sector or anything. The marriage of the two is very important.
- Moderator: So we’re looking at two separate systems and there isn’t a better one to make sure that that aggregation and organization is able to happen because we’ve got different systems that are competing with each other.
- Audience Member: Just one remark and what I find is missing is that, okay, government people for – at the lower level monitoring data, they don’t see the big picture. That’s why there’s no motivation and I think what is important is that the M&E people, personnel, you know, which are organizations at whatever level, they also get to see the larger picture and how it comes to use with it, and you’re talking of – they are collecting data for what? We don’t know what’s going to happen. Where does it go? We enter data into a

computer. How does it affect us? And it's seen as a job only as – as something that is not useful and they're just sitting in the office where they go and collect information. I think it's important in the whole M&E culture to bring them up and also to let them also be involved and be sensitized --

[End of Audio]