

Summer 8-21-2015

# Implementation of a Participatory Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation: Literature Review & Case Study Application

Lucas Sokol-Oxman

SIT Graduate Institute, [lucas.sokoloxman@mail.sit.edu](mailto:lucas.sokoloxman@mail.sit.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones>

 Part of the [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Organization Development Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sokol-Oxman, Lucas, "Implementation of a Participatory Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation: Literature Review & Case Study Application" (2015). *Capstone Collection*. 2817.  
<http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones/2817>

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

# **IMPLEMENTATION OF A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Literature Review & Case Study Application

by

LUCAS SOKOL-OXMAN

Amy Jersild, Advisor

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Sustainable Development: International Policy and Management

SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING GRADUATE INSTITUTE DC CENTER  
Washington, DC

7 AUGUST 2015

# Consent to Use of Capstone

I hereby grant permission for World Learning to publish my Capstone on its websites and in any of its digital/electronic collections, and to reproduce and transmit my CAPSTONE ELECTRONICALLY. I understand that World Learning's websites and digital collections are publicly available via the Internet. I agree that World Learning is NOT responsible for any unauthorized use of my Capstone by any third party who might access it on the Internet or otherwise.

Student name: Lucas Sokol-Oxman

Date: 7 August 2015

# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction  | 1  |
| Literature Review Part 1  | 1  |
| Definition and purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation | 1  |
| Application of PM&E   | 7  |
| Literature Review Part 2  | 14 |
| PM&E for organizational strengthening and institutional learning  | 14 |
| Reflection and conclusions  | 17 |
| Case study application: Women Thrive Worldwide                    | 17 |
| Background  | 17 |
| Organizational approach to M&E                                    | 20 |
| Measuring advocacy  | 22 |
| Reflection and personal learning                                  | 24 |
| Additional resources  | 25 |
| Results-based M&E system  | 26 |
| Designing and implementing an M&E system                          | 28 |
| Conclusion  | 37 |
| References  | 38 |

## List of abbreviations

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| CBO    | community-based organization   |
| CRS    | Catholic Relief Services   |
| FAO    | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations                              |
| FGD    | focus group discussion   |
| FLOW   | Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women                                       |
| HDRC   | Human Development and Research Center  |
| M&E    | monitoring and evaluation  |
| NGO    | non-governmental organization  |
| PM&E   | participatory monitoring and evaluation  |
| PRIA   | Participatory Research in Asia   |
| PO     | people's organization  |
| SMART  | specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant, and time-bound                      |
| SPICED | subjective, participatory, interpreted, cross-checked, empowering, and disaggregated |
| SWOT   | strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats                                     |
| UN     | United Nations   |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme   |

**Abstract**

A literature review is presented drawing from a variety of experts and practitioners who discuss their knowledge and experience with participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). The findings suggest that the broader participation of stakeholders further enhances the quality and credibility of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Collaboration and engagement between implementors and beneficiaries enhances the sustainability of program outcomes after the program's involvement ends. Recommendations are made about how participation could be incorporated into the implementation of an M&E system for Women Thrive Worldwide. Additional resources to facilitate the development of a PM&E system are offered.

*Keywords:* participation, participatory monitoring and evaluation, monitoring and evaluation, organizational strengthening, institutional learning, community-based monitoring and evaluation, results-based monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, grassroots women

## **Introduction**

This paper combines a literature review and a case study application of the process of implementing a monitoring and evaluation system with an emphasis on participation. The literature review is divided into two parts. It begins with a definition and purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation, familiarly known as PM&E, before an outline of the steps to take and methodology involved in PM&E implementation are described. The review ends with a particular use of PM&E whereby it can be used to strengthen organizations and promote an environment of learning within institutions. For the case study application, the findings of the literature review provide a basis for analysis of how the approach and practice of PM&E may look for a particular organization, Women Thrive Worldwide. Finally, the paper concludes with a collection of resources that may be used as a guide for Women Thrive Worldwide's monitoring and evaluation system development.

## **Literature Review Part 1**

### **Definition and purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation**

**Integrating participation in monitoring and evaluation.** Marisol Estrella notes that interest in participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) developed due to the international development community's dissatisfaction with conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), characterized by its orientation towards the needs of funding agencies and policy makers. In an effort to maintain 'objectivity', outsiders are usually contracted in the conventional approach to carry out an evaluation (Estrella, 2000). Correspondingly, as Frances Rubin observes, stakeholders directly involved in, or affected by, the very development activities meant to benefit them have little or no input in the evaluation - either in the determination of questions asked or the types of information obtained, or in defining measures

of ‘success’ (Rubin, 1995). In a literature review of PM&E conducted together with John Gaventa, Estrella identified four broad ‘principles’ that contribute to good PM&E practice: participation, learning, negotiation, and flexibility (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

A participatory approach allows various stakeholders to take part in M&E. Stakeholders are those who directly or indirectly become involved in deciding what a project or program should achieve and how it should be achieved.<sup>1</sup> The concept of ‘participation’ is not only emphasized as an important element in development, but correspondingly it is recognized that M&E of development and other community-based initiatives should be participatory.

Participation in M&E can be characterized in two ways: (1) by *whom* (distinguishes between M&E that is externally led, internally led, or jointly-led) it is initiated and conducted, and (2) *whose perspectives* (distinguishes between which stakeholders are emphasized – all major stakeholders, beneficiaries, or marginalized groups) are particularly emphasized (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

The key emphasis of the concept of learning as an underlying principle of PM&E is on ‘practical’ or ‘action-oriented’ learning. Participants involved in the process of learning in PM&E gain skills which strengthen local capacities for planning, problem solving and decision making. “The concept of PM&E as an experiential learning cycle serves to emphasize the point that in PM&E participants together learn from experience and gain the abilities to evaluate their own needs, analyse their own priorities and objectives, and undertake action-oriented planning” (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

As multiple stakeholders come together in the monitoring and evaluation process, negotiation contributes towards the building of trust and changing perception, behaviors and

---

<sup>1</sup> “These may include beneficiaries, project or program staff and management at local, regional, national or international levels, researchers, government agencies, and donors.” Estrella and Gaventa 1998, Pg 17.



attitudes among stakeholders, which affect the way they contribute to the project. Reaching consensus through negotiation becomes particularly evident during the the development of indicators and criteria for monitoring and evaluation, especially when determining whose perspectives are represented in selecting indicators (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

Since there is no prescribed set of approaches to carrying out PM&E, the process continually evolves and adapts according to project-specific circumstances and needs. Therefore it is critical that PM&E be contextual, and takes into account local conditions (socio-cultural, economic, political, institutional contexts). For this reason, the flexibility of PM&E has led to its practice in a wide range of cases (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

In recognition of the central role that local people can play in planning and managing their own development, ‘participatory monitoring shifts the emphasis away from externally-defined and driven programmes and stresses the importance of a locally-relevant process for gathering, analysing and using the information’ (Abbot & Guijt, 1998). The differences between conventional and participatory evaluation are illustrated in Table 1, adapted from Estrella and Gaventa’s literature review of PM&E (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

**Table 1: Differences between conventional & participatory evaluation**

|             | <b>Conventional</b>  | <b>Participatory</b>   |
|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Who</b>  | External experts   | Community members, project staff, facilitator  |
| <b>What</b> | Predetermined indicators of success, principally cost and production outputs   | People identify their own indicators of success, which may include production outputs  |
| <b>How</b>  | Focus on ‘scientific objectivity’; distancing of evaluators from other participants; uniform, complex procedures; delayed, limited access to results | Self-evaluation; simple methods adapted to local culture; open, immediate sharing of results through local involvement in evaluation processes |
| <b>When</b> | Usually upon completion of project/program; sometimes also mid-term  | More frequent, small-scale evaluations   |
| <b>Why</b>  | Accountability, usually summative, to determine if funding continues   | To empower local people to initiate, control and take corrective action  |

Differences between these two approaches to evaluation are not as stark in practice. Outside experts are often engaged as part of a participatory approach, but in different roles and relationships. Qualitative research methods may be applied to either approach. In some cases, participatory evaluation is not an ongoing process. Questions have been raised from critiques of the participatory approach meeting accountability (including accountability to whom and for what) as an issue (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

**Contributing factors to increased interest in PM&E.** Estrella drew from several sources of PM&E literature (Edwards & Hulme, 1995; Estrella & Gaventa, 1998; Guijt & Gaventa, 1998) to determine several factors that contributed to why interest in PM&E grew:

- the trend in management circles towards ‘performance-based accountability’, with greater emphasis placed on achieving results and objectives beyond the financial reporting
- the growing scarcity of funds, leading to a demand for greater accountability and demonstrated impact or success
- the shift towards decentralization and devolution of central government responsibilities and authority to lower levels of government, necessitating new forms of oversight to ensure transparency and to improve support to constituency-responsive initiatives
- stronger capacities and experiences of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) as decision makers and implementers in the development process (Estrella, 2000).

**Defining PM&E.** As Dindo Campilan observes, the central goal of development interventions is to change a situation, from one that is considered problematic to one that is desired. A key concern for such interventions and the underlying reason for M&E is tracking this

change. So, although PM&E is not so different from other more conventional M&E approaches to the extent that the main focus is placed on measuring change, PM&E is distinguished through its conceptualization of *how* to measure change, *who* is involved, and *for what* purposes (Estrella, 2000).

PM&E is viewed as a process either involving:

- the local people/community primarily
- a partnership between project beneficiaries and the usual external M&E specialists/experts
- a wider group of stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in or affected by development interventions (Estrella, 2000).

In reference back to the emphasis of the flexibility of a PM&E approach to evaluation on who measures change and who benefits from learning about these changes, Estrella points out that PM&E is used for different purposes, depending on the different information needs and objectives of stakeholders. These purposes include: to improve project planning and management; to strengthen organizations and promote institutional learning; and to inform policy (Estrella, 2000). Likewise, Campilan notes the similarities between PM&E and conventional M&E in approach to measuring and judging performance. “However, PM&E aims to go beyond simply judging and making decisions, and also seeks to create an enabling environment for stakeholder groups - including those directly involved and affected by a particular intervention - to learn how to define and interpret changes for themselves, and hence to take greater control over their own development” (Estrella, 2000).

**Purpose of PM&E.** According to Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), participatory evaluations, along with ensuring accountability to funders, can and do have many other (and

possible multiple) purposes: learning, promoting participative collective action, building human and organizational capacity, empowering people, achieving transformation, and improving communication with others (PRIA, 2003). PM&E may be applied within a variety of contexts, Campilan notes, such as a community development project, as an integral part of institutional/organizational development learning, and/or as a means for influencing policy and ensuring greater public accountability (Estrella, 2000). Researchers at PRIA have noted that participatory approaches have advantages with regard to all of these applications, particularly to those which have the purpose of knowledge and/or capacity and/or collective action-building and ‘empowerment’ (PRIA, 2003).

Like conventional approaches to M&E, PM&E is generally used to measure changes resulting from specific interventions. Change can be measured using a variety of methods, such as tracking inputs, outputs, processes, and/or outcomes (impacts). It may also include monitoring intended and/or unintended consequences, which demonstrates what has been achieved, whether the needs of the intended beneficiaries have been met, and whether the best strategies have been taken. Once again, Estrella draws attention to how the two approaches measure change differently: “The main difference is that in a participatory approach, stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in a programme take part in selecting the indicators to measure changes, in collecting information, and in evaluation findings” (Estrella, 2000).

‘What is lost and what is gained’ often becomes a key dilemma during the PM&E process as monitoring moves away from a scientist-dominated approach towards greater community involvement. But since it cannot be assumed that quantitative measures will not be used in participatory approaches, nor that they are necessarily more objective than qualitative measures, the decision to use either quantitative or qualitative data is not the issue. Rather, determining the

purpose and the interpretation of information is considered more important (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998).

An important part of any M&E intervention is the context within which it may be conducted, but particularly crucial for the effectiveness of a participatory approach. Campilan shares the thoughts of participants engaged in a workshop introducing beneficiaries in the Philippines to PM&E. Among other insights, they believed any exercise to develop an inventory of PM&E concepts needs to take place in an atmosphere of open-mindedness and mutual respect for divergent opinions (Estrella, 2000).

### **Application of PM&E**

**Translating PM&E into practice.** Estrella identifies the following questions to be considered when undertaking PM&E:

- What are the key steps or stages in the PM&E process?
- Who should be involved, and how?
- How often should PM&E take place?
- What tools and techniques should be used? (Estrella, 2000)

At least four steps are recognized when establishing a PM&E process:

- planning the framework for the PM&E process, and determining objectives and indicators
- gathering data
- analyzing and using data by taking action
- documenting, reporting and sharing information (Estrella, 2000).

During the planning stage, the different stakeholders come together to express their concerns and address differing interests. Not only will the stakeholders have to determine their

objectives for monitoring, but also select what information should be monitored, for whom, and who should be involved. Knowing who will use the information typically determines what should be monitored and how the results and findings will be applied. Therefore, the planning stage is considered to be the most critical to the success of establishing a PM&E process (Estrella, 2000).

After objectives have been agreed upon, indicators will need to be identified in order to measure success or failure. A common acronym used as a guideline for selecting indicators is ‘SMART’: indicators should be **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**ction-oriented, **r**elevant, and **t**ime-bound. Another acronym more recently offered in PM&E literature that places greater emphasis on developing indicators that stakeholders can define and use directly for their own purposes of interpreting and learning about change is ‘SPICED’: **s**ubjective, **p**articipatory, **i**nterpreted, **c**ommunicable, **e**mpowering, and **d**isaggregated (Estrella, 2000).

The next stage involves the collection of data, whereby a wide range of participatory methods are employed for monitoring and evaluating information. Table 2 provides examples of innovative techniques for PM&E (Estrella, 2000).

**Table 2: List of PM&E methods and their benefits**

| <i>Method</i>                              | <i>Benefits and outputs</i>  |
|--|--|
| Visualized forms that give a score or rank | Provoke reflection and discussion; inclusion of non-literate; simple                               |
| Semi-structured interviews                 | Provides more in-depth information through confidentiality   |
| Household livelihood strategies            | Provides baseline information  |
| Bio-resource flows                         | Identifying local indicators of change, learn about farmers’ priorities                            |
| Story-telling                              | Helps researcher and participants to switch roles; is a familiar tradition of information exchange |
| Questionnaires                             | Data collection  |

These methods are drawn from a variety of different disciplines. Many of them are drawn from participatory learning methodologies, which explains the inclusion of more non-traditional methods such as audio-visual, interviewing and group work techniques. They can be quantitative, such as community surveys and ecological assessments, with an emphasis on participation and accessibility to local people. Methods have even been adapted from anthropological research, including oral testimonies and direct observation (Estrella, 2000).

Although ideally data analysis takes place throughout the data gathering stage, the next step after data collection is the processing and analyzing of the information that has been collected. Throughout the data analysis stage, the relevant stakeholders should critically reflect on challenges and successes, understand the impacts of their efforts, and act on what they have learned. Ultimately, this information will guide stakeholders in making decisions and identifying future action (Estrella, 2000).

Finally, the documentation and reporting of information serves as an important way of disseminating findings and learning from others' experiences. The steps involved in this stage form what is referred to as the 'PM&E learning cycle'. In his manual entitled *Participatory Evaluation: A User's Guide*, Jacob Pfohl describes an essential feature of this cycle involving a continuous process of reflection by stakeholders on what is being monitored and evaluated, where the process is leading them, and the lessons gained from their own successes and mistakes (Estrella, 2000). In practice, local circumstances or stakeholder needs change and therefore the PM&E process evolves and adapts accordingly.

**Steps to take in PM&E.** PRIA identify four steps to take in any participatory evaluation: determine the purpose/objectives; what information is needed; who conducts analysis and reflection; and the process of reporting.

The first step in any evaluation is to determine its purpose or objectives so as “to judge whether or not the stated outputs, outcomes or impact of an activity have been achieved (and why they have or have not been); to improve performance; to inform decision-making; gather knowledge and learning; build capacity; empower people; done for reasons of accountability” (PRIA, 2003). When the purpose/objectives are determined, it must be a participatory process closely related to a discussion around “why an evaluation is needed, whom it is to benefit, what problems it may lead to within the project, programme or organisation concerned, what information is needed and who should provide it, collect it and analyse it, and what questions need to be asked in order to elicit it” (PRIA, 2003).

In order to identify the information needed, the indicators must be established, and the sources and kinds of information relevant to them identified. This information is collected generally through a variety of activities, such as conventional surveys and questionnaires, group discussions and even one-on-one interviews. However, for those lacking confidence, or basic literacy and communication skills, or in circumstances where culturally-entrenched norms and mores (such as those concerning the status and role of women) or time constraints (where people are working hard for their living) result in the exclusion of some to participate. Since the entire purpose of participatory forms of evaluation is to empower people, these problems can be addressed using innovative methodologies (PRIA, 2003).

The process of analysis and reflection in conventional evaluations is often the role of outside evaluators, acting on behalf of external donors and institutions (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998). In participatory evaluation, however, it is important that analysis and reflection be as much a collective and participatory process as the determination of purpose and collection of information, so that it becomes a shared rather than an individual responsibility. The conclusions



reached via the analysis must also be shared with all those for whom the information was gathered (PRIA, 2003). Certain analytical tools and techniques are used during participatory forms of evaluation, such as Cost-Benefit Analysis and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analysis, which are adaptations developed primarily for conventional approaches. Others, such as Values-Based Analysis, are more typically associated with participatory methods (PRIA, 2003).

Commonly in the ‘classic’ conventional evaluation, the evaluator’s report will only be shared with donors or other ‘higher level’ institutional stakeholders who requested or commissioned the evaluation, and with senior project/program/organizational staff. ‘Reporting’ in a participatory evaluation is much more dynamic - it becomes a matter of sharing and of collectively creating future scenarios and directions. Its form is less formal, as evaluation findings and recommendations are discussed to develop new or revised plans, objectives, and goals. Rather than be displayed as ‘bullet points’ in a written report, the desired or needed changes may be displayed visually or presented artistically through other innovative techniques (PRIA, 2003).

**Methods in PM&E.** Because of the need to ensure rigor and participation, as well as to consider different information needs of stakeholders, Irene Guijt considers it inevitable that a combination of methods (and methodologies) are to be used in PM&E processes: qualitative and quantitative, locally and externally created, logframe-based and open-ended, oral and visual (Estrella, 2000). Guijt refers to several other authors in PM&E literature who stress the importance of understanding local conditions and communication forms when selecting/adapting methods. “If a participatory method is to be interactive, it has to be locally adjusted” (Estrella, 2000).

Since the perceived ‘trustworthiness’ of information is directly related to its source, in a participatory process Guijt calls for more negotiation about what each stakeholder group considers ‘rigor’ to be (also citing Estrella and Gaventa, 1998) and greater acceptance of different information sources and methods. Achieving a balance between scientific rigor and local participation relies heavily on the objectives of the monitoring process. Participation can be emphasized when monitoring is less about providing proof to others, and more about improving learning and planning. Furthermore, local indicators of change and local norms for ‘trustworthiness’ can be adopted if local proof of impact is needed. Externally acceptable approaches might be necessary when proof is needed for scientific and/or policy audiences, in order to demonstrate changes in compatible ways (Estrella, 2000).

Since the participatory aspect of PM&E leads to a shift in roles, it can be met with some resistance. Guijt concludes that an organization’s capacity to undertake PM&E depends on people’s individual skills and mind-sets (particularly willingness to change), while also influenced by the dominating institutional culture. When negotiating roles and responsibilities, she points to three aspects that need consideration in PM&E: comprehension of the tasks at hand; the problem of time and scope of responsibility; and the need for flexibility (Estrella, 2000).

Strong facilitators are relied upon heavily for PM&E, as with many other forms of participatory development. Facilitation of method development and adaptation is fundamental to success. Therefore, Guijt views these facilitators to be essential in fulfilling the following functions: guarding the core principles and aims; preventing the process from becoming mechanical and dominated by the vocal minority; and helping to negotiate differences (Estrella, 2000).

A key question to answer before addressing other areas of inquiry regarding documentation is, 'For whom is documentation useful and/or necessary?' (See Box 1)<sup>2</sup>

***Box 1: Questioning the documentation***

- For whom is documentation useful or necessary - farmers, project staff, Northern donors or other projects?
- How will documentation be used - to report to donors, for active use in planning, for scientific proof, to spread PM&E?
- What will be documented - the processes or the data, the mistakes or the successes, the methods or the final analysis?
- What form will the documentation take - diagrammatic, written, numbers, tape recordings or video?
- How often will documentation be shared - once a year, twice, every week?
- Where will it be stored, and how will access to data and findings be managed - on computers or paper, in community halls or in the NGO/government office?

When efforts to share and use the data actively are not made, documentation can easily disempower participants. To keep the documentation locally relevant and useful takes conscious effort.

Designing and implementing PM&E processes, Guijt concludes, requires openness to new ways of learning about familiar context, to new types of indicators for established goals, and to new roles for established partners. The challenges relate particularly to acceptable levels of rigor, and with it developing complementary methods, applying multi-level PM&E, and linking PM&E to the project cycle. Which objectives are more important: compliance and accountability, or learning and adaptation? If it is to be learning, then 'Learning for whom?' and 'Learning for what?' (Estrella, 2000)

---

<sup>2</sup> Estrella 2000, Pg 214.

## Literature Review Part 2

### PM&E for organizational strengthening and institutional learning

Penelope Ward describes the concept of a 'learning organization' as a valuable tool for strengthening people's capacities, establishing effective feedback mechanisms, and improving performance (see Box 2).<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Box 2: What is a 'learning organization'?***

'A Learning Organization is one in which people at all levels, individuals and collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results they really care about.'

(Karash, 1997:1)

'A Learning Organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.'

(Garvin, 1993:78)

The following features characterize a learning organization:

- adapting to the environments in which it operates
- continually enhancing its capability to change and adapt
- developing collective as well as individual learning
- using the results of learning to achieve better results.

Hamel and Prahalad (1994) have developed a model that defines four levels of learning to show how organizations evolve and develop new knowledge and skills (see Box 3).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Estrella 2000, Pg153.

<sup>4</sup> Estrella 2000, Pg 153.

***Box 3: Four levels of learning***

|  |
|--|
| <p>Level 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning facts, knowledge, processes and procedures</li><li>• Applies knowledge to familiar situations where changes are minor</li></ul> <p>Level 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning new job skills that are transferable to other situations</li><li>• Applies knowledge to new situations where existing responses need to be changed</li><li>• Bringing in outside expertise as a useful learning strategy</li></ul> <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning to adapt</li><li>• Applies knowledge to more dynamic situations where the solutions need to be developed</li><li>• Experimentation and deriving lessons from success and failure</li></ul> <p>Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being innovative and creative - designing the future rather than merely adapting to it</li><li>• Assumptions are challenged and knowledge is reframed</li></ul> |
|--|

While learning processes at Level 1 and 2 can be accomplished relatively quickly and easily within an organization, critical challenges to higher learning begin when organizations start to develop from Level 2 to Level 3 (Estrella, 2000).

Organizational strengthening and institutional learning is one of the newer contexts in which PM&E is increasingly being applied. Organizations and institutions, such as NGOs, CBOs and POs, can use PM&E to keep track of their progress and build on areas of work where success is recognized. As organizational capacities of self-reflection and learning are strengthened, their development efforts become more sustainable and effective (Estrella, 2000).

In the context of institutional learning and accountability, instead of a way to report and audit, PM&E can be used to demand greater social responsiveness and ethical responsibility. In effect, PM&E allows local stakeholders to measure the performance of funding and government agencies and to hold them accountable for their actions and interventions. If beneficiaries and project participants are able to better articulate and advocate their needs and expectations, their service delivery needs may be more easily met (Estrella, 2000).

But, as Gaventa and Blauert point out, learning to work across difference, to resolve conflicts, and to create new kinds of inter-institutional collaboration often requires institutions to change internally as well. Applying PM&E from within, to develop a systematic yet adaptive way understanding what has or has not yet been achieved, can aid organizations and institutions to learn what they have done well and what they have not, and how their stakeholders perceive them. All of this allows for change to occur, as they can use this information and appropriately respond to improve on institutional behavior and performance (Estrella, 2000).

In an influential article he wrote in 1980 on community organization and rural development, David Korten articulated a learning-based approach to achieving impact and competence: ‘The key was not preplanning, but an organization with the capacity for embracing error, learning with the people, and building new knowledge and institutional capacity through action’ (Korten, 1980). Understanding how knowledge is acquired, shared, and documented are all essential to organizational learning. Basically, the detection and correction of errors, and the application by individuals within these organizations of the lessons learned are what is required.

Similarly to how a change in organizational practice is best achieved if individual change in attitude and behavior is encouraged and provided with incentives, an organization itself learns best in a way that corresponds to its prevailing culture and needs. Gaventa and Blauert suggest that where the organizational culture does provide openness to learning, two further elements are critical to enable a sustained interest in it (as opposed to a resistance to it): (i) initiating the process, and the approach, by identifying feasible ‘entry points’ of interest and opportunity for change; and (ii) keeping information and time involvement to a minimum to avoid people being overwhelmed and to allow them to feel safe with change (Estrella, 2000).

Although no single approach to PM&E enables or guarantees effective institutional learning, Gaventa and Blauert offer several common themes or lessons that may be useful in implementing a successful PM&E process for institutional learning: the importance of change and flexibility, ownership, internal accountability, and trust and trustworthiness.

### **Reflection and conclusions**

The successful establishment of a participatory M&E process ultimately depends on numerous factors, including the willingness and commitment of all stakeholders, the availability of time and resources, a conducive external (institutional) environment, and the availability of baseline data. Because of the different contexts within which PM&E is applied, it has yet to be determined whether there are a minimum set of conditions prior to PM&E implementation in order to ensure success (Estrella, 2000).

Although no single, conceptual definition of PM&E has been generally accepted, a wide scope is allowed for interpretation and implementation. The resulting versatility of the process and approach of PM&E has led to its use in hundreds of projects in differing contexts and programs across the world. The aim of this literature review was to analyze what PM&E experts and practitioners have written about these experiences in order to gain a better understanding of the purpose and methods of PM&E. Drawing from this knowledge, the review's final section discussed how organizations and institutions that take a participatory approach externally to evaluate programming often requires them to change internally as well.

### **Case study application: Women Thrive Worldwide**

#### **Background**

Women Thrive Worldwide envisions a world in which men and women work together as equals so that they, their families and their communities can thrive. Founded in 1998 by Ritu

Sharma and Elise Fiber-Smith under the name “Women’s EDGE Coalition”, Women Thrive has since established itself as the leading nonprofit organization bringing the voice of women around the world directly to decision makers in Washington, D.C. The organization’s primary focus has been to advocate for U.S. policies in developing countries that support women in their efforts to end poverty in their lives, communities, and nations. Through the organization’s network, known as the Alliance for Women’s Solutions, of 115 organizations in 34 countries, Women Thrive amplifies the voice and solutions of women and girls living in poverty globally by strengthening the advocacy capacity of women’s groups, promoting national and global policies and funding for inclusive development and assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of gender integration in global development programs.

More than 1.3 billion people live on less than \$1 per day and women account for the vast majority of the world’s poor, estimated to amount to 829 million according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The World Bank reports that 48 million women and children are victims of war, natural disasters, extreme poverty and other forms of adults around the world are women. Girls account for more than 60 percent of the 113 million children not enrolled in primary school worldwide. Of the girls who do begin primary school, only 1 in 4 are still in school 4 years later. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) have found that women produce between 60-80 percent of the food in most developing countries, and are responsible for ½ the world’s food production. Yet governments and international organizations often fail to recognize their roles as farmers, food producers, and food providers, as well as their contribution to household food security. Additionally, women represent 75 percent of workers in the “shadow” or informal economy, and have not yet realized their potential to contribute to and benefit from the global economy.



Every year the U.S. spends just under 1 percent of the federal budget on international assistance, which equates to about \$20 billion geared towards the promotion of economic growth and poverty reduction. While direct assistance programs for the poor are very important, positive policy change is crucial for long-term impact. If U.S. assistance and trade policies do not address the unique barriers women face, they will not reach the women who need them and will only be half as effective as they could be. Women Thrive works to ensure that U.S. policy addresses the unique barriers that women face, they will not reach the women who need them and will only be half as effective as they could be. Women Thrive works to ensure that U.S. policy is addressing these barriers and supporting women's efforts to find their own path out of poverty. Working with a diverse coalition of over 115 organizations and 75,000 individual supporters, Women Thrive mobilizes Americans and policymakers in Washington, D.C. to make these solutions a reality for the millions of women around the world struggling to escape poverty on the basis that – as a major world power, donor, and trading partner – U.S. international assistance and trade policies have disproportionate impact on women in poor countries. Women Thrive's goal is to help bring the voices of women and girls around the world into discussions about the policies that impact their lives. Only then can their needs, priorities, and concerns be meaningfully addressed and effective solutions adopted to reduce poverty at the local level. Far too often, global discussions about poverty and developing countries are made without accounting for the needs of women and girls. Women Thrive believes that the solution lies in raising women's voices: staff works to ensure the U.S. is investing in women and girls around the world and listening to what they have to say when it comes to making decisions on the global level.

Women Thrive consults with hundreds of local women's organizations on the ground in developing countries to ensure that the policies it proposes and shapes are solving the real

problems women face in their daily lives. Women Thrive believes that real change happens when women and girls are at the table and able to share what's most important to them – issues such as freedom from violence, access to a quality education, and economic opportunity to lift their families out of poverty.

In its seventeenth year, Women Thrive enters a transitional phase under new leadership, and correspondingly looks to implement strategic objectives and achieve sustainable outcomes. Despite the changes in organizational structure, the organization remains poised to further build upon its strengths and mission-driven approach.

### **Organizational approach to M&E**

Interviewing key informants within Women Thrive led to a better contextual understanding of not only where the organization stood with regards to M&E practice and where they were heading, but also how the development of a participatory methodology with the M&E practice would look.

Women Thrive is amidst a shift in approach to how it conducts M&E. Previously the organization had been rating the effectiveness of its advocacy in the U.S. using a form of self-assessment involving the following indicators: informing, mapping, awareness raising, political will-building, coalition movement building, and changing policy. Current leadership were not satisfied with this set of indicators for several reasons. To begin with, these measures only apply to the indirect efforts of Women Thrive's work to leverage change: advocacy and campaigning. But what of the direct strategies they employ to build capacity and train partner organizations to meet the needs of women at the grassroots level? The second issue is that the indicators are too static, particularly for tracking change and the impact of advocacy on policy or legislation. Because achieving advocacy goals can take time, failure to reach a target is not necessarily an

indicator of lack of progress. And finally, the findings of the assessment would have been made more robust were an external agent to conduct the exercise, rather than organizational leadership.

Moving forward, Women Thrive will have one M&E system but it will be measuring different outcomes for each of the programs because the inputs will be different. For the Alliance for Women's Solutions program the focus will be advocacy capacity building. For the Coalition for Equitable Development program the focus will be research and development of position papers. And for the Change Champions program the focus will be on programs and activities that mobilize a U.S. voice. For the purposes of the research, this paper will only speak to the Alliance program, because that really is the basis of Women Thrive's work. It is through the Alliance program that Women Thrive learn about members' perspectives and what the women at the grassroots level they represent are really saying. Together with the other two programs, Women Thrive will integrate those perspectives into the policy positions that different coalitions they are a part of hold.

The basis for the evidence that will inform Women Thrive's advocacy will come from two pieces of information: the survey of three issue areas (gender-based violence, economic opportunity, and education) indicating what women want, and then what women get will be captured via a facilitated focus group discussion (i.e., community scorecards) about whether women's needs and expectations are met. The focus groups may go into more depth than the survey but they two serve different purposes. With focus groups, Women Thrive want to know the extent to which programs are meeting the letter of the policy. For the surveys, Women Thrive is trying to capture some general consensus or indications of policy directions.

But all of that is not the organizational level M&E, it's the foundational level that over time will contour and change the quality of the organization's policy stances and policy engagement. To design a M&E system of the Alliance program there are other things to be taken into consideration like capacity building and training of partners on how to do advocacy and their ability to measure the subsequent results. This would be captured via a pre- and post-survey of how participants rate their skills before and after the program. Another skill participants would report their progress on is how well they are able to identify issues and develop plans for advocacy campaigns. Any success they have had at this should be documented. The Alliance program will also help partners employ stakeholder- and power-mapping tools in order to identify decision makers to target but also additional partners they may want to include in a campaign.

### **Measuring advocacy**

Advocacy is much more than winning out in an argument about a particular policy, getting the government to act, or obtaining funding for a certain cause. It can go way beyond this to include tackling blockages to change that revolve around how issues are framed, whose agendas are recognized as requiring resolution, who gets a seat at the table, and whose voices are heard and whose are excluded. In this manner, advocacy will create a radically different political and policy context, through appealing to wider audiences and strengthening the voices of marginalized communities, and groups that represent them. This sort of approach to advocacy, going beyond policy change, facilitates wider participation in political processes, shifts power dynamics and ensures that people's rights are understood and upheld. In the end, the goal of advocacy efforts should be to ensure that not only change is implemented, but that results are sustainable (Schlangen & Coe, 2014).

As outlined in the literature, Women Thrive will envision two ways to measure the impact of advocacy. Of course they hope to achieve their target, whether that means a bill or policy is passed, the U.S. government takes action on an issue, or funding is received from a donor to implement an initiative. Women Thrive recognizes that these actions take time to be realized, and that necessitates better selection of indicators to measure success or progress made towards achieving the targets listed above. Although a successful advocacy campaign is the goal, “campaigning success can be presented in somewhat underwhelming ways as a result ... [falling] far short of offering convincing evidence about actual contribution to the wider goal” (Coe & Majot, 2013).

In this manner, an outcome of policy implementation is really what Women Thrive aims for as an advocacy outcome. Gender policy and language may be achieved, but what happens after that? The next step is to track implementation. The approach they take would be similar for capacity building work, in that Women Thrive would not be satisfied having just completed a training. Rather they would look to see whether the skills imparted have been used by the participants and/or shared with other community members of partners who have not yet been trained. Important capacity building areas to track the progress of include participants’ ownership of the advocacy issues and the impact of new skills (webinars, coaching, training). Indicators to measure the participant’s progress towards achieving higher capacity would include increased funding or an assessment of improved use of social media and communications. In total, approximately 50 of Women Thrive’s closest partners who have been actively engaged in the new skills training (communications webinar) would be monitored. Another exciting and innovative tool will be a survey of south-south exchange in order to track who among the Alliance are working together without Women Thrive’s facilitation.

## **Conclusion**

As Women Thrive consults with hundreds of local women's organizations on the ground in developing countries, taking a participatory approach to its community-based objectives would complement the organization's emphasis on stakeholder participation and empowerment. Critical questions such as who measures results and who defines success would refocus Women Thrive towards performance-based accountability and management by results, an increasing concern of donors, governments, NGOs and others.

The participatory methods discussed in this paper would help increase organizational learning and capacity building, as well as the sustainability of results achieved. "While not all evaluations can be participatory to the same degree, it is important that consideration be given to participation of stakeholders, as such participation is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the subsequent use of findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons. Also, including certain groups of stakeholders may be necessary for a complete and fair assessment" (Independent Evaluation Group/World Bank, 2007). Ultimately, successful advocacy reinforces the power of participants' voices. Women Thrive's unique approach to advocacy fully engages communities at the grassroots level. In a manner that distinguishes them from other women's groups that tend to speak on behalf of women, Women Thrive takes the voice of women directly to decision makers so that the needs and concerns they have can be heard.

### **Reflection and personal learning**

Using a participatory approach to development was a concept first introduced to me several years ago during pre-service training in preparation for my Peace Corps Volunteer assignment in Mali. All of the trainees were issued a copy of the *Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA) Training Manual*, a guidebook that outlined a methodology designed to communicate

information, identify needs, and lay the groundwork for community action to solve problems.

PACA methods were applicable to various phases of community action: analysis, identification of projects, determination of indicators, monitoring, and evaluation.

These lessons were revisited this past January throughout my two-week monitoring and evaluation academic field course in Ahmedabad, India. As the course facilitated applied learning and reflection on conducting M&E tasks focused on issues of marginalization, a small group of my classmates and I were able to work together and engage with staff members of the Human Development Research Center (HDRC) on the development of a front-end assessment of HDRC's projects focused on gender and women's rights in the state of Gujarat. This experience provided us with the invaluable opportunity to understand the local development context and the complexities and challenges of addressing issues of marginalization through a project response, as well as to gain insight into various approaches and challenges of conducting M&E.

Fortunately, I have been able to continue to further develop my experiential learning about participation and M&E through my practicum placement and capstone research. It was my original intention to practically apply these two components of my graduate studies together into a product that would be of use to my practicum organization. Ultimately, although it certainly was not quite how I had envisioned that process developing, it may very well turn out to be the case that, at the very least, the findings and methodologies I present in this research will be of use as my practicum organization seeks to develop an M&E system that emphasizes the participation of both implementors and beneficiaries.

### **Additional resources**

The following sections are included as resources that may be directly applicable to Women Thrive's ongoing M&E system development. Currently the organization is amidst

writing a proposal for a 5-year project through the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) project. If awarded the grant, Women Thrive would focus on working with well-established partners in their Alliance, and the grassroots women they represent, from Nigeria, Nepal, Senegal, Rwanda and Uganda. Such an award would cover all areas of Women Thrive's work, and allow them to build a global campaign grounded in local realities.

### **Results-based M&E system**

Unlike a traditional implementation-focused M&E system, a result-based approach provides policymakers, managers, and stakeholders with an understanding of the success or failure of that project, program, or policy. Results-based systems help answer the following questions:

- What are the goals of the organization?
- Are they being achieved?
- How can achievement be proven?

Box 4.1 below illustrates some of the key differences between traditional implementation-based M&E systems and results-based M&E systems (Kusek & Rist, 2004). Refer to Annex A for an outline of results-based monitoring and evaluation. In Box 4.2, a list of key terms in results-based management and M&E are defined (OECD/DAC, 2002).



**Box 4.1: Key features of implementation monitoring versus results monitoring****Elements of Implementation Monitoring****(traditionally used for projects)**

- Description of the problem or situation before the intervention
- Benchmarks for activities and immediate outputs
- Data collection on inputs, activities, and immediate outputs
- Systematic reporting on provision of inputs
- Systematic reporting on production of outputs
- Directly linked to a discrete intervention (or series of interventions)
- Designed to provide information on administrative, implementation, and management issues as opposed to broader development effectiveness issues.

**Elements of Results Monitoring****(used for a range of interventions and strategies)**

- Baseline data to describe the problem or situation before the intervention
- Indicators for outcomes
- Data collection on outputs and how and whether they contribute toward achievement of outcomes
- More focus on perceptions of change among stakeholders
- Systematic reporting with more qualitative and quantitative information on the progress toward outcomes
- Done in conjuncture with strategic partners
- Captures information on success or failure of partnership strategy in achieving desired outcomes.

**Box 4.2: Key terms in results-based management, monitoring and evaluation**

| <b>Term</b>              | <b>Defintion</b>  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Results-based management | A management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes, and impacts.  |
| Results chain            | The causal consequence for a development intervention that stipulates the necessary sequence to achieve desired objectives — beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes, impacts, and feedback. In some agencies, reach is part of the results chain between outputs and outcomes. |
| Inputs                   | The financial, human, and material resources used for a development intervention.   |
| Results                  | The outputs, outcomes, or impacts (intended or unintended, positive or negative) of a development intervention.   |
| Outputs                  | The products, capital goods and services that result from a development intervention. This may also include changes resulting from the intervention that are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.   |
| Outcomes                 | The achieved or likely short-term and medium-term effects of the outputs of a development intervention.   |
| Impacts                  | Positive or negative, primary or secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.  |
| Indicator                | A quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor.   |

## Designing and implementing an M&E system

An excellent model for the critical thinking required to design and implement an M&E system can be found in the Catholic Relief Services' *Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation* manual. This section will summarize several components of this manual that would be particularly resourceful as Women Thrive embark on the development of their own unique M&E system.

**Core M&E standards.** Catholic Relief Services (CRS) identifies the following core M&E standards, shown below in Box 5, which apply to all aspects of M&E and to each M&E activity.

### ***Box 5: Core M&E standards***

1. M&E systems include “need-to-know” information only.
2. M&E staff collects reliable data.
3. M&E staff transforms data into information and then into knowledge.
4. M&E staff uses and disseminates results.

It is important to remember that collecting indicator data costs time and money, so it should be clear why each indicator has been chosen, how each responds to a specific information need, and how the information that will be generated will be used by stakeholders to inform decisions they need to make or actions they will take. This is familiarly referred to as the “less is more” principle for indicator selection (Stetson, Hahn, Leege, Reynolds, & Sharrock, 2007). Monitoring the data these indicators capture allows project staff and other stakeholders to make decisions to improve project quality and effectiveness in a timely manner. This data can also reveal how well objectives are being met or if revision and improvement is needed. Additionally, community concerns and hesitations may need to be addressed by providing additional outputs or skills related to the project objectives (Hagens, Morel, Causton, & Way, 2008).

The reliability of data affects key project and management decisions and quality. Collecting reliable data begins with the appropriate tools and methodology for data collection,

well-trained data collectors and data enterers, and requires several quality checks throughout the data collection and entry process (Hagens et al., 2008).

All data collected must be analyzed and transformed into information specifically formulated to meet M&E plan needs and inform decision-makers. Knowledge comes from the subsequent absorption, assimilation, understanding and appreciation of that information. Learning is the process through which individual and agency knowledge is gained. The practical application of learning will enable an organization to deliver greater impact with a given set of resources (Stetson et al., 2007).

Without using the results of the M&E process, the activity remains incomplete. A simple discussion during regularly scheduled project meetings of the latest findings can help identify and address any problems immediately and replicate successes. Results should be disseminated throughout the organization, including project staff, technical staff and management staff, as each staff position will learn from the results in different ways and contribute differently to their interpretation and to the decisions made based on these results. It is important to tailor the means of dissemination to each specific stakeholder in order to accommodate their understanding or preference. Maintaining full transparency with results is critical, and means including not only successes and accomplishments but also challenges, weaknesses and lessons learned. An analysis of the results and how to address any problems or challenges identified is important to include, as well (Stetson et al., 2007).

**Gender and M&E.** This is an incredibly relevant section of CRS's *Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation* guidebook for any M&E program Women Thrive develop. In order to ensure project effectiveness, it is recommended to incorporate relevant gender issues and considerations into the design and implementation of all M&E activities. M&E systems should be designed to

draw women's perspectives, to consider gender issues in the local context, and to determine the ways in which interventions impact men and women differently. Women's perspectives may only be heard if tools and methods of data collection are adapted so that information from women on project impact can be gathered successfully. Box 5 below shows the standards for gender mainstreaming of M&E design and implementation (Hagens et al., 2008).

***Box 5: Gender and M&E***

1. M&E systems include a comparison of data from women and from men.
2. M&E staff collects data from women in culturally appropriate ways.

When analyzing project outcomes, or drawing comparisons between male and female perspectives on project outcomes, the impact on women should be specifically investigated. Given the societal and cultural norms of a particular context that dictate women's daily activities and responsibilities, they may provide different information than men. Women may know more about issues related to the household while men may be more knowledgeable of issues such as land tenure. Separate questions should be specifically designed for women in order to draw upon their knowledge related to the project (Hagens et al., 2008).

Sensitivity of cultural norms of men and women is enormously important knowledge to assess at the community level. For instance, women may join men for community meetings in some areas, but in other villages they may not be able to attend, even within their own village. Often the best approach is to hold separate focus groups for women and for men. This allows for women to voice their opinions openly and may be more culturally appropriate. Accordingly, female staff should facilitate and document focus groups with women beneficiaries. Topics that may be particularly controversial or emotional in the target community should be avoided, as they will not only yield unreliable data but also may compromise the relationship between the

service provider and the community. Worse yet, if the questions raise issues related to gender, they may place women at risk of harm (Hagens et al., 2008).

**Project monitoring.** This section of CRS' guidebook on M&E highlights the importance of monitoring the project and context both formally and informally. Informal monitoring refers to the monitoring of any unintended results, both positive and negative, and any changes to the project context during staff visits. This knowledge may be already assumed among project staff, but without sharing and discussing this knowledge informal monitoring data cannot inform project decisions and management. Informal monitoring data can be gathered through observations of behaviors and practices, conversations with community members and leaders and other stakeholders, and observations of external factors that signify changes in the project context. While the advantage of informal monitoring data is that it can be collected more frequently than in formal monitoring tools, it should be complemented by formal monitoring data collected through qualitative and quantitative monitoring tools (Hagens et al., 2008). Please refer to Annex B for an example of a form designed to collect informal monitoring data (Hagens et al., 2008).

Another important component of project monitoring is the engagement of communities in M&E system design. Community involvement in monitoring benefits both communities and project quality. It also often increases the community's sense of ownership of the project as well as awareness of key issues that they identified earlier on in the design process. A spectrum of community participation in monitoring is illustrated in Box 6 below (Hagens, et al., 2008).

**Box 6: Spectrum of community participation in monitoring**

| Top-down approach                                       | Monitoring participation spectrum                            |  |   | Participatory Approach   |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Communities provide data but do not receive the results | Communities provide data and receive feedback on the results | Communities provide data and participate in interpretation of data and results | Communities participate in the collection of data from community members and interpretation of data and results | Communities participate in the selection of indicators and methods, collect data, and interpret data and results |

Ongoing projects should identify where they fall in the spectrum and determine if there are feasible steps that can be taken to increase the level of community participation in monitoring. If a project has yet to begin, a feasible starting point should be determined based upon given current staff and community capacity (Hagens, et al., 2008).

**Community scorecards.** A useful participatory tool that can be developed by community members to measure change and set thresholds for achievement is known as a community scorecard. The development of this tool begins with communities selecting the criteria or indicators the scorecard would track. All indicators should either individually or as a group be tied to a desired quality or change that can be measured. Either through voting or consensus, community members designate the current status from a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest or best. Each criterion's value is added together to yield a baseline from which the scorecard can be used to regularly track the course of change for multiple services or situations (Hagens et al., 2008). An adaptation of this tool from the perspective of women would be particularly useful to measure the impact of Women Thrive's work.

Another organization that has great resources on community scorecards is CARE, who has developed a scorecard toolkit that provides guidance for the implementation of scorecard tool. *The Scorecard Toolkit* lists the following techniques as required to effectively implement the scorecard:

- Understanding of the local administrative setting, including decentralized governance and management at this level,
- Good participatory facilitation skills to support the process,
- A strong awareness raising process to ensure maximum participation from the community and other local stakeholders, and
- Planning ahead of time. (CARE, 2007).

**Community participation in M&E:** Community participation refers to increasing the community's voice throughout the M&E cycle of design, collection, analysis and use of data. Box 7 below lists the standards CRS identify for community participation in M&E. Community participation is linked to increased relevance of programming, transparency, accountability, sustainability and ownership of impact (Hagens et al., 2008).

***Box 7: Standards for community participation in M&E***

1. M&E systems track the changes most important to communities.
2. Communities participate in data collection for monitoring and for evaluation.
3. Communities contribute to the interpretation of M&E data.

The changes communities identify that will be the most valuable to them as a result of the project become the indicators, which help the team understand project success through the eyes of the community.

CRS provide the following tips for identifying indicators:

- Use a strong facilitator who is well-oriented to the process and importance of community participation in M&E.
- Facilitate discussions with the community using the terms and concepts that the community chooses.

- Focus on understanding the community's view on what has changed in the community as a result of the project, for whom, and why.
- Help the community identify the changes that are most important to them through a series of focus group discussions (FGDs).
- Hold separate FGDs with men and women in order to reflect different perspectives and experiences within the M&E system.
- Seek confirmation of proposed indicators from the broader community in order to share the indicators suggested by the FGD for validation and discuss mechanisms (who and how) for monitoring progress against these indicators (Hagens et al., 2008).

It is best to conduct these FGDs within the first quarter of the project, so that communities are familiar enough with the project to be able to discuss meaningfully the changes that may occur as a result and these findings can be included in the larger M&E system. The following questions, as suggested by the Good Enough Guide (Oxfam GB, 2007), may be useful in the FGDs:

- Imagine the project is finished. How will people benefit?
- How will it affect your life?
- What will you see happening?

It is also beneficial to ask FGD participants if they see that some in the community will benefit from the project more than others and if so, who, how and why? (Hagens et al., 2008)

***Community-based vs donor-driven M&E.*** It is possible for M&E systems to include both donor-required indicators and indicators identified by the community and other local stakeholders. After community-selected indicators have been specified, they can be added to the



M&E plan when it is finalized during the first quarter of the project. Most donors do not object when project teams include other project-specific indicators to collect all needed information and also will be interested to learn from the community-selected indicators. It should be noted when community-identified indicators differ from existing project indicators. These findings can be included in project reports to document the process of community-based M&E design and demonstrate the importance of community participation to any donor who does not yet value it (Hagens et al., 2008).

**Communities participate in data collection for monitoring and evaluation.**

Community participation in data collection can contribute to greater ownership and reinforce positive behavior change throughout the community. More reliable monitoring results can be found through community monitoring because communities often know which households or individuals do or do not practice a certain technique or behavior and why. The following tips can lead to increased community member involvement in data collection (Hagens et al., 2008).

- Involve the same individuals throughout the monitoring process.
- Determine the frequency of data collection and analysis based on how fast change is likely to occur.
- Ensure the data collection and recording method is appropriate for the specific individuals or groups selected by the community for the task.
- Include all community-selected indicators in community data collection.

**Communities contribute to the interpretation of M&E data.** Involving community members in the interpretation of M&E results can be achieved in the following ways (Hagens et al., 2008):

- Interpret the results with different types of community members (men, women, more vulnerable households or other groups identified through the needs assessment) to share and discuss the project's monitoring results or the results of the baseline, midterm or endline survey or evaluation.
- After data becomes available, FGDs to discuss monitoring and evaluation results should be held.
- Present the overall results for community-selected indicators as well as the results specific to males and females and for different communities as relevant.
- Ask “why” or “why not” probing questions in the discussion to elicit more in-depth explanations.
- Discuss challenges and difficulties openly with the to solicit honest responses (and criticisms) from community members and to demonstrate the team's interest in feedback and learning.
- For baseline and evaluations, include the process for community interpretation of results in the scope of work, ensuring that adequate time and planning are allocated for a high-quality interpretation process.

***Communities voices in M&E.*** As time and other resources allow, the voices of community members who did not directly participate in the project can provide very useful information on the project and should be included whenever appropriate in M&E processes. These community members can provide feedback on the appropriateness of the targeting criteria and selection methods taken during initial stages of the project. Later on during the project or after its completion, they can provide important information about the overall (intended or unintended) impact of the project in the community, including any potentially negative impacts

that project participants may be more reluctant to share. This information can be sufficiently obtained from two focus groups with males and two focus groups with females who did not participate in the project (Hagens et al., 2008).

### **Conclusion**

The guidance presented above is meant to be dynamic and engage implementors in the critical thinking required to design and implement an M&E system. Each project will be different and good M&E practice will vary between contexts. What should remain constant despite contextual difference, however, is the quality of the M&E system and the data it generates.

## References

- Abbot, J. & Guijt, I. (1998). *Changing views on change: Participatory approaches to monitoring the environment*. SARL Discussion Paper 2. London, UK: IIED.
- Cooney, J., DuBois, R., Gasparetti, A., Gathinji, I., Oppenheim, S., Reeves, M., Winger, R., & Yakimakho, O. (2012). *Pact organizational capacity assessment (OCA) handbook: A practical guide to the OCA tool for practitioners and development professionals*. Washington, DC: Pact.
- Estrella, M. (2000). *Learning from change: Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation*. Ottawa, CA: International Development Research Center.
- Estrella, M. & Gaventa, J. (1998). *Who counts reality? Participatory monitoring and evaluation: A literature review*. IDS Working Paper 70. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies (IDS).
- Hagens, C., Morel, D., Causton, A., & Way, C. (2008). *Guidance on monitoring and evaluation*. Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.
- Hahn, S. & Sharrock, G. (2010). *ProPack III: The CRS project package*. Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.
- Korten, D. (1980). Community organization and rural development. *Public Administration Review*, 40 (5). Retrieved from: [http://courses.washington.edu/pbaf531/Korten\\_LearningProcessApproach.pdf](http://courses.washington.edu/pbaf531/Korten_LearningProcessApproach.pdf).
- Kusek, J. & Rist, R. (2004). *Ten steps to a results-based monitoring and evaluation system*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Lagu, M., Curran, Z., Lwanda, F., Joubert, E., Barton, T., Aboda, A., & Thunde, M. (2007). *The scorecard toolkit: A generic guide for implementing the scorecard process to improve*

*quality of services*. Lilongwe, Malawi: CARE Malawi.

Local Livelihoods. (2009). *Results based monitoring and evaluation (2nd edition)*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco\\_library/pdf/RBPME\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/RBPME_Toolkit.pdf).

Oxfam GB. (2007). *The good enough guide: Impact measurement and accountability in emergencies*. Oxford, UK: CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Save the Children, & World Vision International.

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). (2003). *Learning from experiences in participatory evaluation*. New Delhi: PRIA.

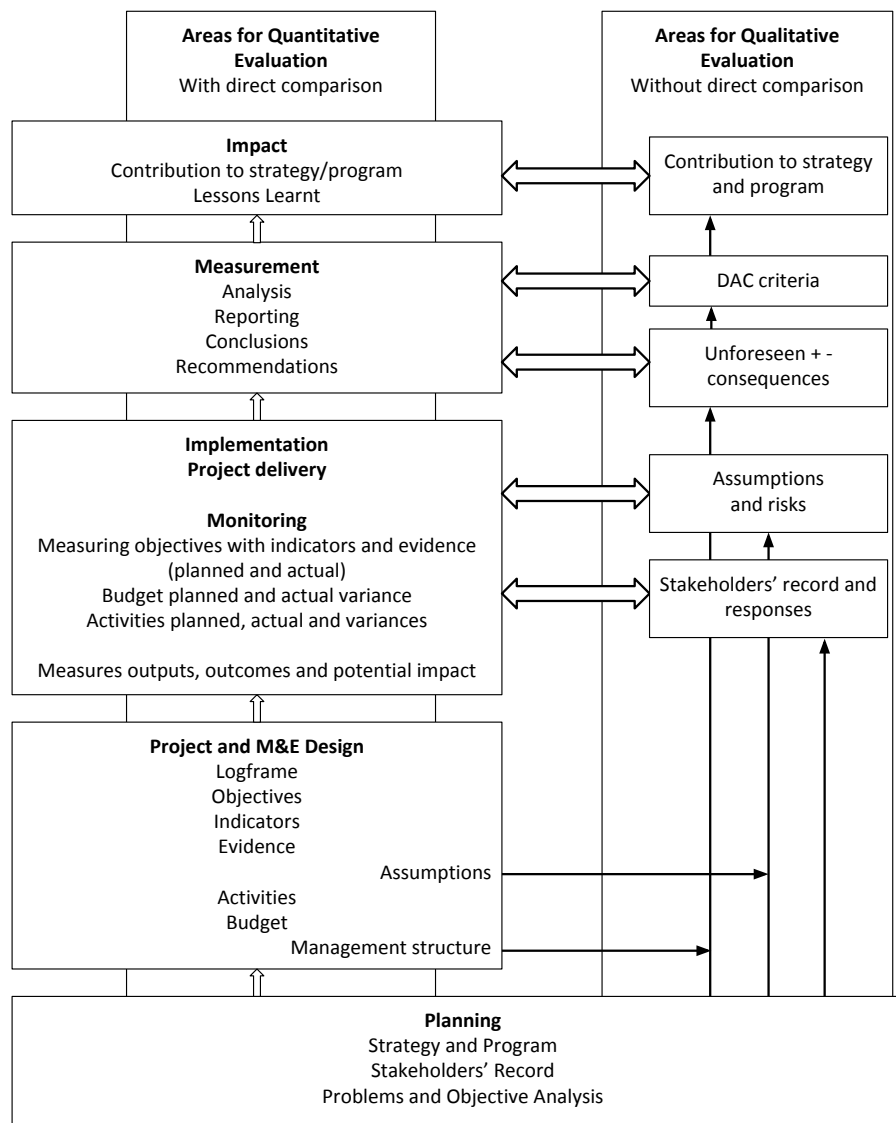
Schlangen, R., & Coe, J. (2014). *The value iceberg: weighing the benefits of advocacy and campaigning*.

Retrieved from <http://betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy%20and%20the%20value%20iceberg.pdf>.

Stetson, V., Hahn, S., Leege, D., Reynolds, D., & Sharrock, G. (2007). *ProPack II: Project management and implementation guidance*. Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.

### Annex A. Results based monitoring and evaluation outline

The left side of this outline describes the stages from the broad strategic plans, at the bottom, in which projects operate going through to project and M&E design, implementation, measurement and to impact at the top. These stages all use planned and actual quantitative measurement. On



the right side of the diagram are the external components that affect the project, and which the project can affect, and which need to be monitored using qualitative measurement to gather actual perceptions of how different stakeholders view the project.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Local Livelihoods 2009, Pg 5-6.

## Annex B. Field trip report

*Why:* To provide project and program managers, heads of programming and heads of office regularized and standardized feedback on a project’s success and challenges, as updated through regular field visits.

*When:* Complete after each trip if field visits occur once a week or less frequently. Complete once a week if field visits occur frequently (daily or weekly).

*Who:* To be completed by most senior project or field officers, preferably electronically; reviewed and commented on by project or program managers who create an action plan for follow-up; then shared with the respective head of programming or head of office for final review and approval.

|                                 |  |                                |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Sector:                         |  | Project number(s):             |  |
| Office:                         |  | Start and end date of trip(s): |  |
| Communities visited:            |  |                                |  |
| Overall purpose of the trip(s): |  |                                |  |

### A. Key observations

Key observations should be based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., focus groups), observations or some other monitoring sheet (e.g., classroom observation sheet); supporting documents should be attached.

| <b>Reportable outputs/ observations</b> (may be determined by program manager) | <b>Successes and highlights</b> (to be completely by most senior field or program officer) | <b>Challenges and ongoing needs</b> (to be completed by most senior field officer or program officer) | <b>Follow-up actions recommended (who/when)</b> (to be completed by most senior field officer or program officer) |
|--|--|---|---|
|  |  |   |   |

### B. Manager’s comments

Program manager must insert comments and feedback and share with direct reports. Head of program or office may choose to write additional comments if required.

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Submitted by: FO/PO  
(Name/Sig/Date)

Reviewed by: PM  
(Name/Sig/Date)

Approved by: HoP/HoO  
(Name/Sig/Date)

Returned to: FO/PO  
(Name/Sig/Date)