Monitoring and Evaluation: Civil Society Organisations' Competitive Edge in Effective Poverty Alleviation

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1. MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)— A COMPETITIVE EDGE

The role of Civil Society Organisations as preferred partners in development is strongly emerging across the globe. Among many reasons, one is reasonably good governance. The social sector has shown the acumen to learn and apply corporate management practices and international standards fast enough to start leading the competition.

Notwithstanding the fact that a large part of development funding under soft loans and grants is channeled to the government, the CSOs receive a significant share directly and indirectly to implement development projects in communities. It has opened tremendous opportunities for CSOs to experiment and evolve new approaches in project management, community organisation, service delivery, product development, resource mobilisation and financial management.

What makes the civil society organisations different from the public sector organisations? Fundamentally two things; these are non-governmental and non-profit. However, the real difference is in the way civil society organisations are managed. It includes leadership, commitment, professionalism, systems and practices, thrust of work and most of all performance.

Good performance is attributed to all the above key elements; however, the competitive edge is attained by following a strong value system of responsibility, accountability and transparency. Thus the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) comes into play.

2. THE M&E CONCEPT IN PRACTICE

Monitoring is basically an on-going activity to track down progress of work in respect of planned activities. It allows frequent access to information through an

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interaction with stakeholders, particularly client communities as well as between functional and managerial staff in the organisation.

Evaluation is a periodic activity, which gets its input partly from regular monitoring and partly from a planned review at a certain point in time or at regular intervals. Whereas monitoring gives an overview of progress and direction, evaluation gives an overview of accomplishments and impact. The two functions are strongly interlinked and complementary to each other.

M&E system is essential to organisational planning, informed decision-making and management support. However, due to lack of emphasis, at times it is being sidelined or under utilised in organisations where the thrust of work is founded on implementing activities and not on achieving results. The system performs four primary functions; i.e. identify facts, reflect upon facts, analyze and propose alternative action where necessary.

3. THE M&E CONCEPT IN STRATEGY

The M&E system looks at the organisation's strategic and operational goals as well as its own objectives being pursued and attained on continuous basis. It can be applied in a comprehensive or a concise manner depending on the size of the organisation, its nature and volume of work and priorities in issues. The most important point is the recognition of the true role of Monitoring and Evaluation in development.

Organisations' sense of responsibility, transparency and commitment to achieving results leads to the decision of adopting such M&E practices that enhance credibility and trust among stakeholders in development programmes.

The M&E system works across sections, horizontally and vertically meaning that all organisational levels and operations are included in its concept and structure. Particularly, when Community Driven Development (CDD) is being pursued by an organisation, M&E system takes its root in the community for a better understanding of issues and feed back on interventions.

A well functional and well accepted M&E System could give tremendous impetus to the work and performance of an organisation. Whereas its functioning depends on creating the right working environment and building capacity; acceptability depends on making it part of the organisation's culture.

There is a two-pronged approach to establishing the foundation of an effective M&E system in the organisation. By creating a trusting environment in which people are not hesitant to talk about their experiences, particularly of failures as well as providing constructive criticism and feedback. And by establishing internal systems that would support coordinating activities of information collection, consolidation, analysis and dissemination. This should include defining relationships and interdependence of various divisions, particularly where multiple interventions are taking place. Emphasis is placed on enhancing synergy in the programme for

receiving optimum output from available resources. The result would be a strong shared responsibility for success and failure.

4. THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SCENARIO IN PAKISTAN

Developing countries, like Pakistan face peculiar problems in monitoring and evaluation systems. Because of various levels of expectations between donors, implementers, and the local communities, the M & E systems are always exposed to complex problems.

PPAF, while working with the poor of the country in various geographic and cultural areas where level of social development and literacy rates are also different, intends to strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems functioning in these organisations.

To improve an M & E mechanism which could grasp diversity of its partner organisations and communities, and be efficient as well, the PPAF recognises the need to understand the already M & E systems in place in these organisations, and compare them with other systems reflecting good practices in monitoring and evaluation. It also intends to strengthen the capacity of its partner organisations so that they could adopt more efficient, effective and relevant M & E systems.

To achieve this purpose PPAF, undertook a comprehensive research, which analysed these systems and suggested guidelines to develop an effective and efficient M & E system.

4.1. Objectives of the Study

Following objectives were set prior to undertaking the task.

- To document currently established M & E systems, functions and practices within PPAF Partner organisations and formulate modules.
- To undertake need analysis for strengthening M & E systems with POs participation.
- To propose action in the light of need analysis.
- To identify good practices in M & E for replication by other partners.

The study was carried out in close coordination with PPAF in four provinces of the country and in Northern Areas. The selected POs (almost 50 percent) were visited and their M & E systems were recorded.

Name of the Organisation	Region
Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP)	Sindh
Sindh Agriculture Forestry Workers Organisation (SAFWCO)	
Taraqee Trust (TT)	Balochistan
Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP)	
Khwendo Kor (KK)	NWFP
Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP)	
Kashf Foundation	Punjab
(Damen)	
(RCDS)	
Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)	Northern Areas

4.2. Methodology

The stakeholders in this study included, PPAF (particularly its MER unit), its partner organisations with specific emphasis on their M & E units or focal persons and the communities of the POs operational areas.

The approach to conduct the study was based on the premises that the systems in M & E in the developing countries have to be understood within their particular context and situation. Keeping this in mind, the following tool were used:

- interviews with concerned implementing staff of the PO at various tiers;
- field research and reviewing of the documents showing M & E systems operational in the PO;
- check list to identify capacity building needs;
- group discussion;
- in-depth interviews.

Meetings with the PPAF staff to seek their views and concerns about the operational M & E procedures within its POs. Review of already completed research studies on the subject

Field visits to study monitoring and evaluation systems, the approaches of PO, understanding by the implementation staff and their actual practices. Keeping in mind the scale of organisations and diversity of geographical locations, 11 POs were selected from all four provinces for the study. These were TRDP, TT, KK, KASHF, DAMEN, RCDS, AKRSP (The sample was almost 50 percent of the total PPAF's POs).

4.3. Summary of Observations

A summaries of observations based on the findings of the study by an external consultant is given below.

- The data collected and analysed shows that maturity of M & E systems within different organisations is at different stages of their development.

However, most of the organisations' leadership is realising the importance of monitoring and evaluations system to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisations' programmes. The willingness to improve the systems show capability of these organisations to take a leap from their present positions to develop into a real agency of change to alleviate poverty in the given out reach areas, and hence contributing in overall development of the country at large.

- The study describes the M & E systems of sampled POs. It was found out that out of the organisations studied, two had independent M & E section. While in other cases, the process of monitoring is woven around their operation plans. The monitoring and evaluation processes of two other POs are effectively being carried out by their operations unit and Programme Support Unit. Four organisations had recently inducted one person to take care of monitoring at the head office level. Two POs monitor their operation through their programme support unit, while two organisations have no specified M & E staff in their organisations.

- Sectoral monitoring, like micro credit, CPI and capacity building is done by their implementation staff at various levels. Amongst these programmes, the monitoring in micro credit is relatively more advanced than other two programmes. Only Two organisations have given focused training on M & E to their staff, while the rest are learning from their own experiences and from training in some aspects of M & E.

- There are different level of monitoring. The first level of information and monitoring in an organisation is its field staff. Despite their highly appreciable and committed efforts, this tier of monitoring remains the main constraint in information flow. However this is due to the fact that field staff is mostly underpaid, less trained, less skilled, works in hard conditions and suffers from extreme workload and demands both from communities and higher levels of hierarchy in the organisation. As they are to perform many tasks at the same time, monitoring does not remain the sole priority.

- On the other hand the community is given training to run the programme during social organisation process. The information collected from their records and verbal communication also provides important information regarding programme monitoring.

- Evaluation is given less importance within M & E system of the organisations studied. Appraisal is done on regular basis. However Impact evaluation still needs to attract attention of organisation's leadership. In this regard resource constraint is another factor which restricts to take up evaluation as a regular feature.

- However there is a growing trend in some organisations to take up ongoing evaluation and impact evaluations on regular basis. Case studies, quick

evaluation reports, changes documented in the lives of beneficiaries, qualitative assessments of programme benefits and more focus on over all impact evaluation are a few examples in this regard.

- It was found out that the main focus has so far remained on physical and out put monitoring than qualitative aspects of the programme. However, it is gaining importance slowly. Mostly learning from own experiences, the M & E staff is developing indicators on qualitative aspects and documenting them in their routine and monitoring field visits. The integration of social monitoring and cost benefit analysis with social perspective by some organisations is an important step in this direction.

- As pointed out in report one, most of the organisations have come a long way and learnt a lot from successes and failures of their programmes. These lessons learnt are being integrated into M & E systems. Some organisations are quite vigilant in picking up information from informal channels and use this information to improve their functioning.

- The report points out M & E issues, classified in two broad categories, to be addressed. These are process of information collection at field level and POs' policies towards M & E system within organisations.

- Policy support to monitoring and evaluation is not effectively available in almost half of the organisations under study. The major policy related issues included gender sensitivity in M & E and defining management information needs of different stakeholders in POs' projects. Methodological issues to be addressed at senior policy-making bodies include M & E regarding qualitative aspects, assessing information from female COs from area where cultural constraints do not allow such access, and relying on information whose quality may be compared on due to expediency of implementation.

- It was observed that in M & E practices, most of the POs reflect more accountability to donors, followed by their own organisational objectives, and less towards communities they are working for. Reporting formats primarily meet the needs of donors, and then for the consumption of their own operational needs. The information needs of communities are less recognised in these formats. The practice of information sharing of M & E outcome is far less with communities, as compared to that with the donors and their own programme committees.

- Organisational issues included reluctance to share straightforward information between different tiers of some organisations and between POs and COs, due to fear of loosing support. Resource constraints, lack of proper skills in M & E and logistic problems are other major issues. Most of the organisations have also not developed a clear mechanism of how to use M & E data effectively and in a meaningful, way.

- Constraints at different levels of organisation are identified at COs' level, field level, regional level and head office level. The COs may conceal information regarding the programme. There is a problem of literacy; particularly with female COs. Documentation patterns of COs reflect POs' requirements rather than showing their own concerns.
- It was noticed that the regional level and head office level staff is less in contact with field and has to rely on the information processed by field staff whose main function is not exclusively monitoring and evaluation. The presence of M & E staff at this level needs to be ensured and their skill needs to be improved as well.
- Major issues in micro credit and enterprise programme include loan tracking, and accessing female COs for information in certain POs' areas. Constraints in loan tracking include mobile population in certain POs, sanctioning of loan in women's name while being used by men, so lengthening the process of loan tracking. Increased reliance on COs about loan tracking also hinders correct information. The fact that most of rural women are not literate adds problems in book keeping and quality of information. The practice of assessing any change in the lives of loanees also needs to be improved.
- In CPI schemes, in certain POs, the issues of documentation and formal verification of project completion need to be effectively addressed.
- Training needs of staff at different levels and sections of POs are different. Requirements of CO's office bearers in relation to monitoring and reporting, also need to be meaningfully addressed in order to improve the quality of information at the primary level.

5. GOOD PRACTICES IN M&E

Good practices in M & E may be defined as understanding and effective application of standard monitoring and evaluation procedures, adapting already established practices according to local contexts and environment, and developing innovative methods to get and utilise useful information regarding monitoring and evaluation.

These practices are related to various aspects of M & E systems. These aspects include policy approaches towards M & E, methodologies, Social sector monitoring, and Community involvement in M & E the practices of information sharing, utilisation of M & E information, and assessment of non tangible aspects of the programmes are also discussed in this report. The report also briefly touches upon some good practices in sectors of micro credit and enterprise, community physical infrastructure and capacity building.

5.1. Policy Guidelines for M&E Systems

One of the important features of M&E system is to have a clear statement of functions of M&E system within organisation. Many POs are practically conducting monitoring and evaluation with specific procedures suitable to their environment; however SRSP has developed a clear statement of its functions as follows.

- Planning Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Section in SRSP at head office.
- PMER Manual to guide monitoring process.
- All planning begins with Log frame.
- Every region prepares log-frame for themselves.
- Separate LFAs for different projects.
- Decentralised functioning.
- Sector specific flow + flow to MER section.
- Monthly project planning meeting.
- A recent practice is to identify the issues in monitoring and coding them in out put sheets.

5.2. Developing a Realistic Methodology for the M&E System

It is observed that field staff has to do various functions within limited time and logistic facilities available. The purpose of monitoring may be compromised due to these constraints. Sample monitoring may be one solution to collect relevant and quality information about PO's operations. SAFWCO has recently initiated a quarterly monitoring system on sample basis, which is described as follows:

This is a new initiative to strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices in the organisation. The Monitoring Research and Training (MRT) section conducts quarterly monitoring of whole programme on sample basis. Its indicators are more or less similar to those, which are used by sector in charges. However, it takes care of the programme with a holistic approach and intends to report the activities in a more consolidated manner. Following is the description of its current activities.

- Proper implementation of planned activity by SO/CC.
- Maintenance of CO record.
- Meetings on regular basis.
- Follow up of the decisions made during the meetings.
- Impact of intervention.
- Utilisation of loan amount and existence of enterprise.
- Role of credit committee in loan process.
- Involvement of credit committees in assisting borrower.

- Comparative data of loanees before and after loan (assessed through informal discussion).
- Repayment status.
- Funds management (enterprise record) by borrower.
- Progress and physical existence of infrastructure scheme.
- Existence and status of MCH center.
- Visitor's/Patients record.
- Application and impact of learning/training.
- Value addition, for example what could be the spin off effects of the training to CO members' performance. This is conducted by informal discussions and may be reflected in the future progress reports.

5.3. Practice of all Staff Monthly Review Meetings

All staff review meetings provide an opportunity to have a wider interaction and information sharing amongst all staff members and help take timely decisions on the concerning matters. It makes the review process more frequent and participatory as well. TRDP and SAFWCO have developed practice of holding all staff review meetings on monthly basis to review their programmes.

Monthly meetings in TRDP are held in which all programme staff of all field units and head office is present. One date of the month is fixed for meeting. Consolidated monitoring reports of every unit are presented and these reports are followed by open discussions. On the basis of these presentations and discussions, self corrective actions are taken in these meetings.

5.4. Community Involvement in Monitoring and Evaluation

Different organisations are involving their COs in monitoring and evaluation processes. Following is brief description of the patterns these COs are being involved in the M & E functions.

5.4.1. *Role of Community Organisations in M & E in AKRSP*

AKRSP gives considerable importance to its COs. Community organisation are mainly responsible for local level monitoring activities. Community is represented by manager and president in different activities. The COs provide main link of village people with AKRSP. They conduct regular meetings and report of the meetings is maintained in a register. AKRSP provides basic skills training in community management and leadership training to the office bearers of COs. The audit committee members are given training regarding book keeping and maintaining financial records. It is monitored that COs are prepared to perform the following functions;

- Community Organisation (VO, WO, Cluster Organisation and interested groups), effectively manage their own development.

- Level and Range of Skills Locally available to communities is increased.
- Value Added from Integrated Resource Management.
- Infrastructure constructed and effectively maintained by communities.
- Women's participation and benefits from the development process substantially enhanced.
- Incomes from the development of traditional and non-traditional enterprises substantially enhanced.
- Viable and sustainable Credit and Savings programme, serving all communities maintained.
- Effective and sustainable management systems are operational.

All these parameters are assessed against the indicators set in the yearly regional plan.

- In Credit programme Cos' role is in assisting in monitoring the credit programme through identifying potential loanees, monitoring the utilisation of loan, recoveries, maintaining savings records, and monitoring the delinquencies and the reasons behind them.
- In CPI programme, COs' role is in assisting in monitoring of CPI (MIES) programmes through its Project committee, Audit committee and Maintenance Committee. The CO is also responsible for over all supervision of the projects. It keeps a record of funds collected and share of the community in the project. Collects quotations for buying material and keep their record. Its written resolutions at various stages of pre, during and after the project completion provide an important base of information system of AKRSP. The reports by project committee are basis of the release of cheques by AKRSP. Resolution before project is of paramount importance in many respects including part of appraisal, and assessing the community's willingness for the project. AKRSP gives training in hydal power in maintenance, record keeping and billing procedures. Monitoring by field engineers in projects other than hydal power projects is random and on request.

5.4.2. *General Body and Board Member Participation (Formal and Informal) in M&E, in TRDP*

- From every union council one man and one women is elected to become member of General Body. So from 20 union councils 40 community members are elected to become General Body (GB) members. They randomly keep on giving their suggestions to TRDP.

- For Board of Directors (BOD) formation, one man and one woman are taken from every taluka (subdivision), and two or three more members can be added by BOD as its discretionary powers.
- The Board and General Body members do write to Chief Executive if they find any thing going wrong, and that could be of any value regarding of monitoring of the programmes. If they can not write, they communicate verbally. It is also a recent practice that some GB members participate and give their opinions in quarterly and yearly meetings of TRDP.

5.4.3. *Role of Clusters of COs in M & E*

There is an emerging trend in different POs to hold meetings of different COs on basis of clusters or regional basis for sharing of information and feedback regarding ongoing activities. Following is brief description of such practices.

- *Thematic Valley Conference*

A new tier of monitoring is evolving in the working mechanism of AKRSP. The COs which belong to the same valley, get together quarterly and discuss the issues regarding their development work. The conference is a source of information exchange, and provides an opportunity of the appraisal of the projects, and feedback to each other in a free and frank way. The practice is not common in all regions of AKRSP, but gradually it is gaining importance in most of its working areas and heading towards formalisation of this process. The report of these conferences is prepared by social organisers who attend these conferences.

- *Emerging Role of Clusters in M&E in SRSP*

In different regions, clusters are made which comprise of neighboring organisations. In Abbottabad region, until now in 15 UCs, clusters have been made. Skill training has been delegated to clusters. Currently Informal cluster committees share information regarding their projects. More training is required for cluster and networks to make them effective in future. In TRDP, Village Development Organisation is formed by taking 2 members from each CO in the village. VDO takes the overall view of village development, and gives its suggestions on different projects. It can be, in the later phase, used as a tier of monitoring in the formal system as well.

5.4.4. *Policy Guidelines for M&E Systems*

Information sharing between different stakeholders of a programme or project is an essential component for an effective M & E system. Some good practices regarding information sharing were identified in TRDP. The organisation considers that sharing of information at a wider level serves as a useful monitoring tool for its activities. People remain aware of its activities and give their comments, arguments,

and suggestions about their relevance and usefulness. This information sharing is done through following tools.

- *Quarterly newsletter*

    This is published in Sindhi language and is widely circulated in TRDP's programme area. Community members' letters are published in these newsletters. The articles of community members about development activities of TRDP are also published. Minutes of all TRDP monthly meetings, summary and parts of annual reports are published in the newsletter as well. Newsletters become a useful channel of involving communities in the monitoring process. This is a two-way communication from TRDP (about its activities) to the communities and from communities (their analysis, comments and opinion about development activities) to TRDP.

- *Individual Letters of Complaint and Appreciation*

    Community members individually write letters of complaint, criticism or appreciation to field units or to head office. TRDP, as a policy, takes these letters seriously and verifies the contents of letter wherever required. These letters are shared in all monthly TRDP meetings. Suitable actions are taken to address the issues raised in these letters.

- *Video Making*

    In one of units of TRDP, Mithi Bhatrio, some COs have been provided video making cameras and basic training to use them. They make video films on the themes of their choice. During this process, different aspects of development interventions by TRDP are reflected. Since these video films are not pre-determined by TRDP, these films show various unexpected aspects, strengths and weaknesses of development work, and people's straight forward opinions about them. TRDP, as a policy, gives considerable importance to this practice as a monitoring tool and intends to extend it to other field units as well.

- *REFLECT Circles*

    In one of its field units, Reflect circles are established by community members. REFLECT is basically a technique where community members sit together and discuss issues critically which concern their life situations and their causes of marginalisation. REFLECT circles are also conducted around development issues and TRDP activities in the area. These reflect circles and their conclusions and processes are documented in report forms. TRDP is using these reports as monitoring tools, as they express community members' opinions and views. The circles are being held, in one unit more regularly, i.e. on weekly basis. However, this practice is also being popular in other units.

6. NON-TANGIBLE ASPECTS OF MONITORING

There is a newly emerging trend in POs to monitor non-tangible aspects of their programmes' outcomes.

6.1. Social Sector Monitoring at AKRSP

- In addition to the physical aspects of monitoring, AKRSP gives due importance to the monitoring of improvement in social situation of people of its target areas. It makes sure that benefits of its physical infrastructure and other programmes reach to the maximum number of people and these benefits should not be compromised due to already existing power hierarchies in the communities and the conflicts in the communities should not disturb the mechanisms of effective service delivery. Social cost benefit analysis is also done in which social benefits are measured against physical benefits.

- Gender monitoring is more pronounced part of social monitoring procedures. During appraisal, specific needs of the women are taken care of. Harvard analytical framework is used for evaluation of women's situation in the projects. It is made sure that those schemes, of which women are direct beneficiaries, should be managed by women organisations.

6.2. Social Sector Monitoring at SRSP

- An emerging aspect of SRSP is that it has started giving importance to programmes. Its social sector section takes care of qualitative aspects of the programmes. SRPS has a well-defined Gender policy, and in every region a gender focal person takes care of gender monitoring. Qualitative formats are filled and the information is consolidated on quarterly basis. The staff of social sector and gender focal persons visit the field according to work plans and assess the progress in social aspect of people's lives.

6.3. Measuring Empowerment of Women through Credit Programme in DAMEN

- DAMEN has developed a format of measurement in changes of its loanees through its Credit Programme. It is conducted on random basis. The format includes intended changes and their Corresponding indicators.

7.   UTILISATION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION RESULTS

Following are some good practices regarding utilisation of monitoring outcomes;

7.1. Utilisation of Monitoring in AKRSP
- As the operations of AKRSP are widely spread over a larger part of Northern Areas, the procedures of monitoring are also in practice on a

larger scale. This large-scale use of monitoring tools and processes provide a large base of experiences over different areas and in different social groups. This wealth of knowledge adds to the quality and improves the relevance of the monitoring system in the organisation.

Monitoring is used for the following main purposes in AKRSP:

- to assess organisational maturity;
- to assess any conflict in the communities;
- to have timely recoveries of loans;
- to have timely implementation of infrastructure projects;
- to ensure that no social exclusion of certain group in the community is being done.

7.2. Utilisation of Monitoring in SRSP

- *Monitoring Cost Effectiveness*

  SRSP is mainly working on the philosophy of harnessing people's potential through mobilising themselves into men/women community organisations to help themselves. In this respect household membership of community organisations (men/women community organisations) is indicator for measuring the ratio of commutative expenditure and commutative membership.

- *Addressing Conflicts*

  Conflicts do emerge in communities, particularly related to CPI schemes. These are reported through various visits of SOs and other Sectoral programme staff. The conflicts, are timely responded and solved in community meetings.

CONCLUSION

These are some of the effective M&E procedures, practices, and tools used by PPAF partner organisations to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsibility shared with communities. These practices are disseminated in order for other organisations to follow if they so desire. It is learning process in which both PPAF and POs will continue to participate.

How the civil society organisations perceive and practise monitoring and evaluation, we learn from the above study that

- the existence of a well-designed and well functioned M&E system helps in the planning and delivery of services to the poor more effectively;
- there was a genuine need for POs capacity building on M&E in a number of areas as identified in the discussions and draft plan of action;

- there was willingness among partner organisations to improve upon existing M&E systems and practices in their respective organisations and to replicate good practices, and the participants aspired for a long-term commitment from their senior management and colleagues to build M&E capacities at organisational and individual levels.