â??Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult?â??

Description

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By Nigel Simister with Rachel Smith. Published by INTRAC.

â??Whilst few doubt the importance of capacity building, and the need for effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to support this work, the M&E of capacity building is as much a challenge now as it was two decades ago. This paper examines both theory and current practice, and aims to promote debate on some of the key barriers to progress.

The paper is primarily concerned with capacity building within civil society organisations (CSOs), although many of the lessons also apply to commercial and state organisations. It is based on a literature review and interviews with capacity building providers in the North and South.

The paper begins by looking at some key concepts in capacity building and M&E. It examines different ways of thinking about M&E, and different tools and approaches used to plan, monitor and evaluate capacity building work. It goes on to discuss M&E in relation to donors and outlines current practices. Finally, it highlights key areas for discussion, and presents some conclusions based on the research.

The main findings are that where organisations are clear about what they want to achieve through improved capacity (or capacity building) and where there is a clear understanding of the purpose of M&E, it is not difficult to come up with a blend of tools, methodologies and approaches to meet the needs of different stakeholders. But if capacity building providers lack an adequate theory of change; if they do not know what results they want to achieve; or if M&E work is burdened by uncertain or unrealistic demands, then the area can appear to be a minefield.

The paper concludes by presenting some practical guidelines for developing or improving M&E processes. It also highlights the importance of internal commitment to M&E at senior levels within capacity building providers. Finally, it asks whether we need to improve the incentives for those organisations that seriously wish to move the debate forwards.â?•

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See also â??Developing M&E Systems for Complex Organisations: A Methodologyâ?? by Nigel Simester

â??Almost all development organisations are expected to have systems that enable them to collect, analyse, summarise and use information. However, whilst there is a large and growing range of resources covering monitoring and evaluation (M&E), there is little guidance or support for those wishing to design M&E systems. The guidance that is available tends to focus on systems at project or programme level, rather than at country, regional or international levels. This paper attempts to redress this imbalance by describing a methodology that can be used to design an M&E system within a complex organisation.

The paper is divided into two parts:

- Part One describes a methodology for designing an M&E system. This covers a number of stages from defining the scope and purpose of the system to its eventual roll out. However, it does not cover the implementation of the M&E system.
- Part Two addresses many of the technical issues that need to be considered when designing M&E systems for complex organisations. The information in Part Two may be useful to M&E system designers whether or not the basic methodology in Part One is followed.

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