1. AFGHANISTAN

USE OF EVALUATION: LOCAL GOVERNANCE M&E SYSTEM IN AFGHANISTAN

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INTRODUCTION

Established by a Presidential Decree in 2007, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) is Afghanistan's lead government agency for local governance. IDLG is mandated to administer and manage local government institutions (34 provincial governors' offices, 34 provincial councils, 150 municipalities and 370 district governors offices). IDLG and relevant ministries/entities developed the Afghanistan Sub-National Governance Policy, which lays the foundation of strengthening local governance (the policy was approved by the cabinet in 2010). To prioritize the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, the Government of Afghanistan and development partners developed national priority programmes for various sectors. IDLG, being the lead entity for local governance, developed the National Priority Programme for Local Governance in 2012, which will serve as a strategic priority document for local governance for a period of three years. To ensure effective implementation of the National Priority Programme for Local Governance and Sub-National Governance Policy, IDLG developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to measure the results, effectiveness and efficiency of its activities and performances based on national strategic documents for local governance.

IDLG's newly developed M&E framework has four components: monitoring, evaluation, research/surveys and data management/reporting. The framework was developed to establish a national M&E system for IDLG and its subnational entities. In addition, the new M&E framework also focuses on measuring the results and performances of the IDLG's national development programmes, which are funded by various donors and implemented by implementing partners.
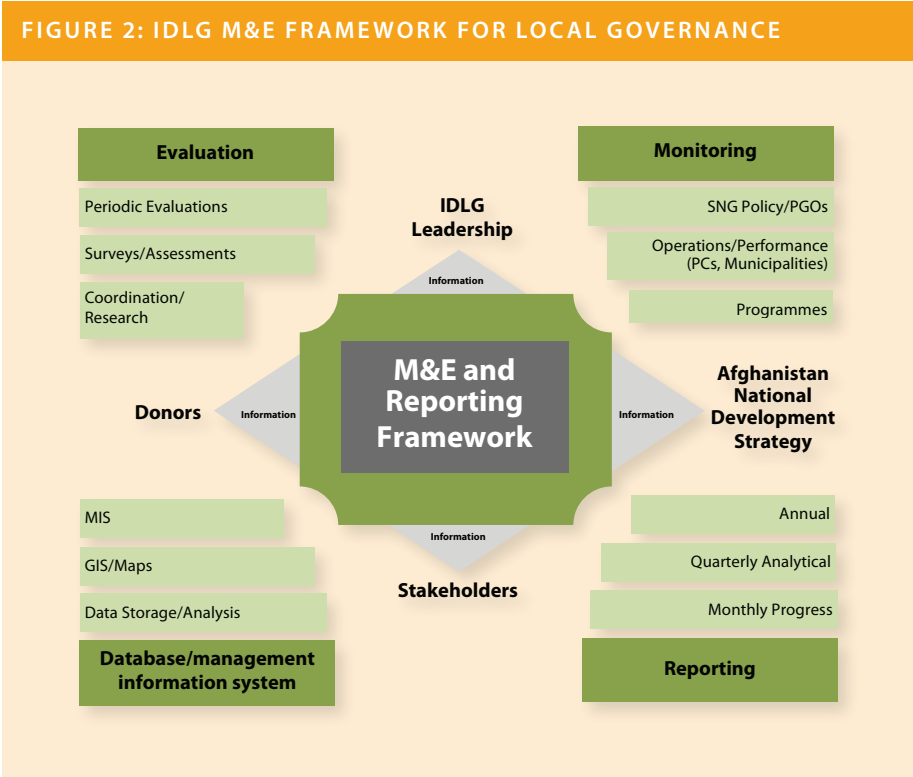
**FIGURE 1: COMPONENTS OF IDLG M&E SYSTEM
FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE**
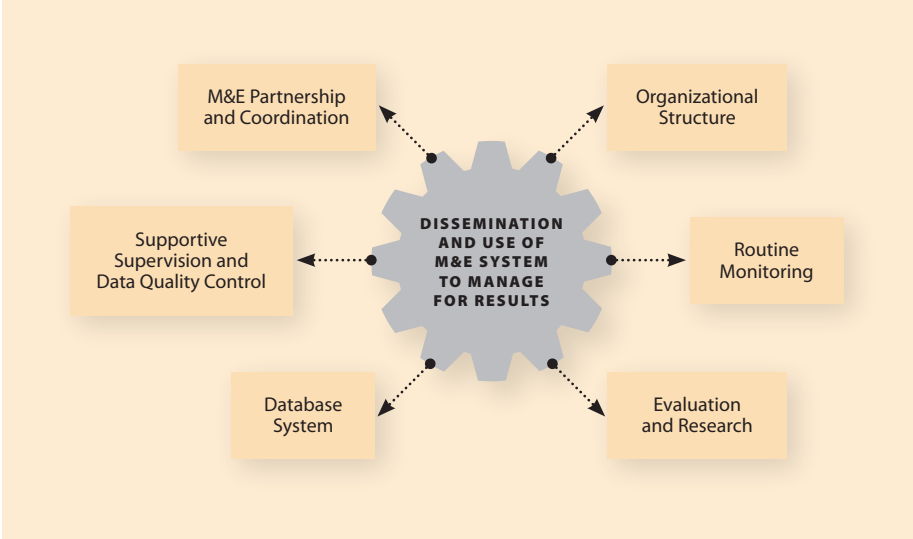
The new M&E framework is being implemented, and as a new practice for the organiza-tion and its entities, there are issues in institutionalizing the system at both the national and subnational levels. Major issues include government employees' limited understanding and capacities of M&E and its values. This is because the concept and use of M&E has been very limited in government agencies and ministries over the past years. M&E has been mainly (and somehow successfully) used in programmes and projects but has been limited in common government functions and activities. In particular, leadership, decision makers' use of evalua-tion and their recognition of its importance have been limited and not systematic. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the challenges and proposed solutions for the use of evalua-tions for local governance in Afghanistan, particularly by leadership and decision makers.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The focus of this paper is on the use of evaluation. M&E is a relatively new practice in Afghanistan, especially within government institutions. The culture of undertaking profes-sional and systematic evaluations, and consequently using the results and information as inputs for effective decision-making and planning, is still poor in the government institutions of Afghanistan. The concept of proper and effective M&E systems has been mainly consid-

FIGURE 2: IDLG M&E FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Evaluation

Periodic Evaluations

Surveys/Assessments

Coordination/
Research

**IDLG
Leadership**

Information

Monitoring

SNG Policy/PGOs

Operations/Performance
(PCs, Municipalities)

Programmes

Donors Information

**M&E and
Reporting
Framework**

Information

**Afghanistan
National
Development
Strategy**

MIS

GIS/Maps

Data Storage/Analysis

**Database/management
information system**

Information

Stakeholders

Annual

Quarterly Analytical

Monthly Progress

Reporting

ered for off-budget,[65] individual projects and programmes, which are typically implemented by non-governmental organizations and donors.

However, in the case of Afghanistan (which is a post-conflict or still-in-conflict country), during the past decade, donors and development partners have not fundamentally focused on applying M&E mechanisms when implementing projects and programmes. In part, this was because of limited capacity and understanding of M&E within the government to push towards more systematic accountability and transparency. This resulted in low-quality implementation of programmes and projects and did not contribute to building a culture of having M&E integration.

IDLG's newly developed M&E framework for subnational governance was based on key strategic documents, which both the government and development partners agreed to implement. Institutionalizing M&E practices has been challenging, particularly because the system is being implemented while IDLG is still building systems for local government,

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65 Programmes/projects implemented not through the national financial system but through contracts to non-governmental organizations/companies.

because of the lack of existing capacities and resources and because of a lack of demand for M&E systems. The government is less interested in applying systematic M&E for its common functions and public administration, while there remains a huge demand by development partners for doing period evaluations and for gathering reports on the performances and results of government functions, activities, programmes and projects.

There are various factors that limit government's demand and use of evaluations, particularly the lack of understanding by the senior management and leadership of the importance of M&E information. There are various factors that affect the process of decision-making based on evaluation findings and reports, such as political willingness, not completely relying on the reports, lack of technical understanding and awareness of the issues raised, and interventions and favouritism. These factors disturb an organization leadership's proper decision-making in planning and taking action. Further, government institutions are typically not very open to sharing information with civil society organizations or the public. This practice of limiting reports and information to the government limits the use of evaluation information and curbs actions on the findings and recommendations. In both internal and external scenarios, there is limited technical understanding of evaluation and the information that is shared.

As with development programmes that are implemented by non-governmental organizations or donors directly, government ownership of evaluations is limited; when there is limited government involvement in the evaluation process, the results and reports are often not seriously considered by the government. Specific evaluations undertaken by implementing partners or by donors are not widely shared for consideration with the government. However, IDLG has taken steps in this regard and, hopefully, by implementing its new M&E framework, IDLG will be in a position to conduct more objective evauations of both its subnational entities and implementing partner programmes.

IDLG is adopting the practice. For example, IDLG implemented a five-year programme for provincial governor offices, which was managed by an implementing partner[66] although IDLG took full leadership on evaluations in its second phase. The quarterly evaluations of the programme were lead by the government with support from implementing partners and donors. Results of the quarterly evaluations were used by the government to measure the performances of local institutions (in this case, the provincial governors offices). The performance ranking system that was used for evaluating provincial governors offices' performance resulted in significant positive competition among the 34 offices. The incentive mechanism (performance-based funding decreases and increases) was a good practice and contributed to better and improved local government performance.

As a good experience, IDLG conducted an evaluation in 2012 of its six national programmes (which are being implemented by various implementing partners and funded by different donors). The results and findings of the evaluation were shared in the Sub-National

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66   See pbgf.gov.af.

Governance Forum,[67] which was attended by key donors and partners. This exercise presented to all stakeholders that the government is now taking a lead and conducting evaluations of the programmes and projects. The forum also alerted partners to use the findings and to align their activities and programmes with government policies and plans.

Building on the positive results of government ownership of evaluation processes, it was recommended that donors ensure effective government participation and stake right from the design and at the programming stage. This year, donors and the government are jointly working to design programmes and to ensure that the government has an effective role in and ownership of evaluations, including reporting and decision-making, beginning with programme design. This is happening in IDLG with one of the key donors (the United States Agency for International Development) for its subnational governance programmes in Afghanistan. This will ensure the building of government capacities, ensure more ownership and will help in better decision-making by the government. Ultimately, this will contribute to better transparency, accountability and that programmes will be effectively implemented in accord with government policies and strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above stated points about the use of evaluation, and based on my experiences in Afghanistan working both with the government and non-governmental organizations over the past years, I summarize my statements on why evaluations are not effectively used in public administration:

- Limited understanding and practical experiences of using effective evaluations within government institutions/systems. This is specifically the problem with decision makers and higher officials who are mostly politically oriented;

- Lack of institutionalization of systematic evaluation processes in government institutions due to various factors described above. In addition, there is limited attention from development partners or counterparts to conducting evaluations jointly or involving government institutions for ownership and capacity-building;

- It is sometimes difficult to apply effective and systematic evaluations to the government's common functions; evaluations are typically more applicable to specific development projects and programmes;

- Evaluation and its effective use are not separate, as both should be part of an M&E system within organizations, programmes and projects; Afghanistan still lacks proper and effective M&E systems;

- Due to lack of professional expertise, evaluations are seen as burdensome and something undertaken at the end of the work, and, because the nature of projects and programmes may change, as an exercise that may or may not be helpful to

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67 The Sub-National Governance Forum is chaired by IDLG and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and conducted every six weeks to discuss the progress/achievements and issues regarding local governance.

future activities. Therefore, the findings are not considered as important to learning as focusing on gaining new programmes and resources; and

- Donors, government counterparts, and project and programme beneficiaries lack common or equal understanding of the value of evaluation. This is because the interests of these parties vary, and sometimes politics affects effective use of evaluations reports.

Considering the aforesaid issues, I make the following recommendations for the effective use of evaluation:

- Creating a culture of conducting evaluations and using their results by institutionalizing the process and agreeing on principles and valuation among involved parties will enormously contribute to the effective use of evaluations;

- An evaluation's independence and credibility will facilitate its effective use; conflicts of interest in conducting evaluations and political interference will decrease an evaluation's value;

- Evaluations should be part of a system and clearly communicated to stakeholders from the beginning of a project or programme. This will avoid later surprise or hesitance by the parties that conduct and/or use an evaluation. This will also increase stakeholder and government ownership of the process, which is an important issue in development; and

- Decision makers should be involved in evaluation processes in order to ensure effective use, decision-making and action based on evaluation results.