

25. EGYPT

INSTITUTIONALIZING AND STREAMLINING DEVELOPMENT MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN PRE- AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

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BACKGROUND

M&E in Egypt has taken stunning steps since the beginning of the new millennium. Although far from independent or widely used, diagnostic and readiness assessments were taken as tools to enhance credibility.

In early 2000, the Government of Egypt recognized that budgetary processes seemed to create obstacles that inhibited the changes the government desired to induce performance. The Ministry of Finance therefore requested the World Bank to review the budgetary process in light of the identified obstacles. Looking through an Egyptian lens, the cause for development M&E was taken up by a champion minister who managed to assemble a like-minded ministerial team. Upon concluding a diagnostic study by the World Bank, it was recognized that Egypt possessed leadership, incentives and drivers, mandates and clear authorities, a well-defined strategy for results-based budgeting, pockets of innovation, links to resource decisions, a workable strategy to implement and a set of donor-sponsored activities. The diagnosing team met and interviewed government officials, academics, donors and others. This was an early opportunity to interview and advocate for the use of M&E that was just beginning to bud in the Ministry of Finance. Development M&E was a completely new concept to Egyptians—and still is.

STRATEGY: THE FIRST READINESS ASSESSMENT, CHAMPIONS SELECTION, CAPACITY BUILDING, IMPLEMENTATION AND ADVOCACY

In September 2001, upon completion of the readiness assessment, the Ministry of Finance announced the launch of the national capacity-building programme in performance-based budgeting development M&E. The minister communicated to the public the various approaches to results and budgeting orientation that had been adopted worldwide, and relayed his vision and provisional implementation strategy that he hoped to realize in collaboration with other pilot line ministries.

He divulged the results of the World Bank's diagnostic mission and the road ahead to implement a development M&E/performance-based budgeting (PBB) capacity-building effort in five pilot ministries at the initial stage of project implementation. Training efforts and awareness raising to ministries commenced at this stage. The national strategy was announced in a widely covered international economic conference held in Egypt. The Government of Egypt's programme was launched as a pilot, starting in 2003. The pilot programmes chosen were closely linked to public service delivery in key development sectors such as budget and resource allocation, education, health and taxation.

Advocacy work proceeded at different levels, including communications with parliamentary members on programme progress, periodic meetings among champion ministers to review progress and facilitate overcoming obstacles, forming sub-ministerial committees to coordinate operations at individual line ministries, assigning national experts to design capacity-building programmes at the entry, intermediate and advanced levels of development M&E and conducting meta-reviews by visiting international experts collaborating with the Ministry of Finance.

Press conferences were held to pave the way towards creating a culture of performance. Progress on building government capacities in performance-based budgeting M&E was used to create other products, bulletins and publications citing and documenting government reforms. Other reports were generated by development partners (e.g. UNDP and the World Bank) operating in Egypt and supporting the development M&E reform programme. The partners acknowledged the unmatched Egyptian success story led by the Government of Egypt.

PROGRAMME PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Within project life (one and a half year), 1,500 government officials were trained on the 10 steps to establishing sustainable M&E systems at various levels of sophistication and different economic sectors. Technical coaching resulted in preparing multi-year performance-based budgets for the pilots. As an incentive towards this paradigm shift, the Minister of Finance pledged to retain ministerial budgetary appropriations at least equal to what line ministers had requested earlier. This was coupled with constant communication with the non-champion ministers, parliament's powerful planning and budget committees, the media and the public. Civil society was experiencing serious bottlenecks and was versed in neither development M&E nor its importance.

Upon building national capacities in the government through the pilots, the Minister of Finance, together with the champion ministers, decided to sustain the effort to the future. In the meantime, the Ministry of Finance received requests from all non-pilot ministries to subscribe to the programme as a result of its demonstrated success. The Minister of Finance issued a decree to establish and fund sustainable M&E units in the state administrative apparatus on the night of the government shuffle that overthrew the champion ministers, wasting the opportunity to upscale and continue the programme in pilots and other ministries.

Overnight, political priorities changed, and the Egyptian success story turned to failure. That said, the pilots and pockets of innovation proceeded with the work advocated for and based on their faith and buy-in for the cause of development M&E.

THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT M&E IN CIVIL SOCIETY

The first Egyptian non-government network evolved in 2005 upon the conclusion of the International Development Evaluation Association's first biennale conference. The network connects around 40 professional development M&E experts and is in the process of formalization as the Egyptian Development Evaluation Association (EgyDEval). The network runs discussion groups and advocacy workshops for national evaluators and the media. A second non-government network was formalized with the support of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in early 2013 and subscribes around 200 research and evaluation experts. It has run a number of awareness creation workshops, launched a diploma in public research and evaluation with one of the state universities, and has invested in 'Arabizing' leading world-class publications in development M&E.

THE SECOND READINESS ASSESSMENT STUDY

An independent readiness assessment was conducted in the interim period between the two revolutionary waves in Egypt (January 2011 and June 2013). The assessment was conducted by two scholars, one of which is the author of this paper. After the first national experience with national capacity building in the Egyptian government prior to termination in July 2004, a mapping exercise of available innovations were cited. These included civil society organizations, government institutions, university curricula, donor-sponsored capacity-building programmes and others. Sixty-two development M&E professionals were interviewed through face-to-face meetings and/or surveyed electronically. They spanned development partners; donors; university scholars; political parties; national, regional and international development M&E networks; government institutions; research centres and think tanks; parliaments and legislative bodies; media; and independent consultants.

The self-designed, mixed-method readiness assessment analytic tool is composed of four main sections: background and information on the respondent, development M&E status quo in the country and its institutional level, the impact of the revolution on country and institutional development M&E, and a set of probing queries on a vision for the future.

CONCLUSIONS

The diagnostic tool derived a set of informative conclusions on the status of development M&E in Egypt in the post-revolutionary era. They are summarized as follows:

- Almost 90 percent of those surveyed suggested that there is a lack of interest and understanding in Egypt of development M&E, and its importance in the context of development projects;
- Two thirds of respondents view development M&E as a demand-driven activity within their organizations. In a number of cases, respondents cited development M&E reporting being commissioned in response to donor demands;
- Respondents were asked specifically at what point in development programmes' project flow evaluations should take place. The majority suggested that evaluations should be conducted at each point in the project implementation stage, but there is a greater majority who see development M&E as a necessity on the completion of projects;
- The majority of organizations perform development M&E at the project level and to a lesser extent at the programme, policy and sector level.;
- Most of those surveyed have significant experience (more than five years) in development M&E;
- Respondents are split on matters related to development M&E data accessibility. Slightly more than half felt that the data required to conduct a satisfactory evaluation of a development project is not easily accessible or available. The disparity in responses could be due to differing resources across organizations;
- Half of the organizations implement development M&E at the working team level. However, the majority have less than five staffers involved in evaluation;
- Most employees working in development M&E hold at least an undergraduate qualification, with almost half possessing an advanced university degree. This, together with the years of experience mentioned above, indicates that the development M&E employees surveyed are well-educated and trained in the development M&E field, which lends extra credibility to the responses' robustness;
- Most respondents prepared M&E reports on quarterly and annual basis. Many respondents confirmed that development M&E reports are prepared on *ad hoc* basis, based on project demand;
- Development M&E reports are disseminated through websites and to internal stakeholders;
- Development M&E reports are mostly prepared at project end and mainly on donors request rather than being embedded within project design. The purpose is mainly for securing future funding requirements, either for the same project or others;

- Reports are, if and when, used to address operational issues in the course of project implementation. In other instances, reports are used in budget negotiations for future project results improvements. Sometimes, development M&E reports are used in higher policy-level discussions and especially in support of policy amendments;
- Over two thirds of respondents offered capacity-building opportunities on development M&E to their organizations and others. The majority of capacity-building efforts are delivered through on-the-job-learning;
- Almost two thirds of respondents believed that development M&E has no effect on policy formulation or implementation. In addition, development M&E reporting is insufficiently appreciated as a tool for planning and budgeting;
- Within organizations, development M&E is seen as a useful tool when it comes to designing and streamlining projects and also in providing insights and policy recommendations for future projects. However, this does not often get translated into a tangible benefit for projects when it comes to decision-making at the management and government levels;
- Practitioners compiling development M&E reports listed many challenges to completing them. The primary issue, facing 43 percent of organizations, is a lack of data access and, when accessible, its inaccuracy. When data is accessible, organizational staffers often lack the necessary analytical skills. Both of these can serve to undermine the effectiveness and credibility of development M&E reports by giving conclusions that are not based on reliable data or analysis;
- Another key challenge is a perceived lack of awareness of or appreciation for the value of development M&E in Egypt. Even donors who encouraged evaluations were more focused on evaluation of inputs than results. Media was complacent to exposing the negative results of government performance;
- Respondents affirmed the challenge of lacking development M&E capacity-building opportunities and its considerable high cost;
- The perceived effect of the 25 January 2011 revolution on the development industry is negative. Eighty percent of respondents contend that the revolution either had a negative or no effect on the realization of development objectives in Egypt. Many respondents believe that Egypt has taken a step back from where it was in the pre-revolution context when it comes to the realization of development objectives; and
- Specific to development M&E, there is a mixed opinion, with just over half of responses indicating that the 2011 revolution had some influence on the development M&E reporting in Egypt. On the negative side, the revolution resulted in greater degree of economic and political instability, which not only makes development M&E reporting more difficult to conduct because of funding constraints, but also undermines its significance in the context of a country in crisis. On the other hand, the increased role of youth dictates higher demands for development projects and their

results. Some respondents also viewed the sweeping constitutional reforms that followed the revolution as an opportunity for development M&E in Egypt, as they hope that some provision can be made for mandatory evaluations going forward.

SOLUTIONS

- Fuel demand for the institutionalizing development M&E in state administrative bodies in order to fulfil citizenry needs and revolutionary motos;
- Create an enabling environment through socio-economic pressures and lobby for effective development projects that yield results through the adoption of development M&E techniques and tools and ensure mutual accountability;
- Facilitate donor harmonization of efforts in support of creating and effecting a culture of performance within the government;
- Actively engage civil society organizations through government partnerships to build capacity, conduct development M&E evaluations and encourage their dissemination as learning tools;
- Develop consulted, comprehensive national capacity-building programmes in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, independent think tanks, training institutes and universities;
- Embed policy, programme and project evaluation in the constitution, and ensure the competent authority is equipped with the capacity required to do the job; and
- Improve utilization, standardized quality measures, enforcement mechanisms, independence, incentives, codes of ethics, transparency and public accountability.

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