

USE AND COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS IN GOVERNMENT PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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BACKGROUND

In Latin America government interest is growing in the use of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) systems as a strategic tool to collect information on the results of public management and policy.⁷¹ PM&E systems can be used as tools to help develop and allocate resources based on the effectiveness of services and outcomes of national development plans, providing evidence of what works. These systems are also expected to yield evidence on the gains achieved by development interventions and how this translates into improvements in people's living conditions.

While demand is increasing for government PM&E systems, views differ on what constitutes the key to success—that is, on what makes these systems work effectively for timely decision making and for informing citizens at several levels. Global experience shows that PM&E systems work best when they combine at least three dimensions: (1) an appropriate institutional/organizational framework; (2) quality data on results and impacts; and (3) a strategy to use and communicate the results so they are fed into decision-making and inform citizens. These three elements can enable PM&E systems to become institutionalized while enabling understanding of these changes and engagement of the actors involved in developing solutions.

70. Coordinator, Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

71. PM&E systems involve data collection and use processes to obtain evidence of changes created either directly or indirectly as a result of development interventions. It is understood that for a PM&E system to be results oriented, it should include effect and impact indicators and benchmarks in its design, as well as systematic initial, midterm and terminal data collection on an intervention. It also involves reporting systematically on the intervention's outputs, effects and the likelihood of achieving the expected impact. It requires uses, users, time, effort and resources, and it has political, technical and organizational implications.

A review of the literature and research undertaken in Latin America showed the significance of using the results yielded by PM&E systems, in particular the pioneering study by Nuria Cunill and Sonia Ospina (2008),⁷² jointly commissioned by the Latin American Centre for Development Management (CLAD) and the World Bank. It entailed a comparative study of government PM&E systems in 12 countries in the region. This paper also drew on some of the conclusions of two research studies conducted by Regional Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREVAL) on the issues likely to influence institutionalization of national M&E systems.

While the Cunill & Ospina research focuses on national government bodies, the study conducted by PREVAL was a rapid appraisal of PM&E systems in public rural development institutes and agencies. Its aim was to assess the status of PM&E systems, including their strengths and weaknesses and the use and communication of results by decision-makers and citizens at large. The PREVAL study included two appraisals, one on national government bodies responsible for rural development policy⁷³ and the other on IFAD co-funded project implementation units. The latter is the third round of a series of surveys conducted by PREVAL between 2004 and 2009. For the first time it addressed national government bodies responsible for rural development policy, seeking to obtain a more comprehensive picture by addressing both central government and territorial levels.

Following is a summary of key aspects of Cunill and Ospina's conclusions, followed by the findings of the PREVAL surveys on the status of government PM&E systems, with a special focus on use and communication of results. The aim is to obtain a quick overview of three different government levels: (1) government bodies at central levels; (2) national government agencies responsible for rural development policy; and (3) project technical units with a territorial scope. These conclusions will aid in shaping future processes to strengthen evaluation capacity in public administration in Latin America and the Caribbean, establishing national evaluation systems in line with the challenges facing the development agenda.

PARTICIPATION, USE AND COMMUNICATION OF PM&E RESULTS IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

An important feature of M&E systems is that they go beyond technical aspects; they are a political and managerial function whose use should lead to progress in development agendas, which requires leadership and decision-making. A key issue affecting the use of

72. Nuria Cunill and Sonia Ospina, 'Fortalecimiento de los sistemas de Monitoreo y Evaluación en América Latina. Informe comparativo de 12 países', World Bank / CLAD, January 2008. Osvaldo Feinstein, 'Método para el análisis rápido concentrado (Marco) de sistemas de seguimiento y evaluación', IFAD, 1993. Daniel Jesús Ccori and Antonio Pozo Solís, 'Institucionalización del Seguimiento y Evaluación en proyectos cofinanciados por el FIDA en América Latina y el Caribe'. A report on 2004 and 2007 survey results, PREVAL, 2007.

73. The survey researched five countries: Argentina (the General Directorate for Policy Planning and Evaluation of the Under-Secretariat for Rural Development and Family Agriculture), by Emma Rotondo; Honduras (Honduran Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock), by Alejandro Vásquez; Nicaragua (PRORURAL), by Eduardo Centeno; Paraguay (the National Directorate for Project Management and Coordination), by Antonio Pozo; and Peru (the Ministry of Agriculture's Agro-Rural Programme), by Augusto Cavassa.

M&E systems is the potential consequences of results. Where reports are required to be amended (that is, where there is feedback), it is more likely that the information will have real impact on a public agency, according to the Cunill & Ospina research.

Governments in the region have claimed that accountability is an important purpose of M&E mechanisms, yet they provide few opportunities to include citizens or incorporate them as users. The PREVAL surveys mentioned above highlight the lack of use of existing mechanisms for citizen participation and control. In one instance (SINERGIA in Colombia) the system has a relevant module in place, but user participation nevertheless tends to be marginal and theoretical only. The overall conclusion of Cunill & Ospina is that M&E systems have little impact in terms of improving the roles they are intended to measure, whether planning, budgeting, accountability or improvement of institutions and programmes.

PARTICIPATION, USE AND COMMUNICATION OF PM&E IN AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PREVAL conducted a rapid appraisal on a sample of public agencies responsible for PM&E in rural development and small-scale household farming in five countries. The study addressed the following types of agencies:

- Management planning and evaluation unit in the agricultural sector (Honduras);
- National directorate for policy evaluation (Argentina);
- National directorate responsible for project monitoring in the agricultural sector (Paraguay);
- Special programmes comprising international aid projects aimed at supporting small-scale farming (Peru and Nicaragua).

Monitoring and evaluation actions involve the measurement of first-level outputs or changes based on the achievement of physical and budgetary targets against those planned by projects and programmes either run by the ministry of agriculture or attached to it. M&E instruments are largely aligned, based on guidelines provided by the ministry of agriculture and usually the ministries of economy and finance. However, it is not unusual to find different formats, depending on whether the subject to be monitored is a development plan, the sectoral planning unit and/or the ministry or secretariat of the treasury.

No effect or impact indicators have been developed so far, as these institutions lack the methods and instruments to measure and cross-check indicators. Little work has been done to research the linkages between public systems at the central level and citizens' participation and supervision during the public policy cycle. Nevertheless, PREVAL believes that local experiences with monitoring and evaluation of government and civil society projects are those that need to be documented.⁷⁴

74. These involve citizens' observatories, social audits and local committees for resource allocation (CLAR), which are often integrated with local governments and organizations. See the section on 'Good Practice' on the PREVAL website <www.preval.org>.

Overall, the use and communication of results as part of public PM&E systems is rare, as results are solely delivered in writing to government data-collection agencies. The main uses of data collection are reporting to control agencies (e.g., the general accounting office); complying with payments and services; and reporting to institutions such as the ministry of the treasury and planning secretariat. Other outputs, such as journals, videos and reports, are generally developed by projects funded by international donors, who normally provide the required resources.

The PM&E function at central level rarely has tools or mechanisms in place to involve users, local governments or rural organizations. An exception is the Agro-Rural programme in Peru, which comprises IFAD co-funded projects such as the Cusco-Puno Corridor and the Southern Highlands project. These projects have in place local consultation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including local committees for resource allocation.⁷⁵ However, these mechanisms both start and end at the local level; they do not influence decision-making at central level. In the case of the secretariat of agriculture and livestock in Honduras, participatory strategic planning processes are being developed in line with a policy to promote the development and strengthening of agricultural and food production chains and free trade agreements. This has been seized as an opportunity to implement medium- and long-term programmes and plans. However, these same processes are not being implemented for operational planning or the remaining PM&E sub-systems. Neither the secretariat nor (consequently) the management planning and evaluation unit has a culture of using participatory methods to develop operational plans or monitoring and evaluation actions.

At a territorial level, based on the data collected at the decentralized sectoral units, there is a general lack of knowledge regarding monitoring and evaluation issues. A large majority of these units do not have dedicated staff to carry out M&E activities. Nor do they have specialist staff to provide advice on issues facing project monitoring and evaluation. This lack of knowledge results in poor implementation of M&E activities.

PM&E IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

In 2004, 2007 and 2008, PREVAL conducted surveys of IFAD co-funded projects to identify the status and progress made by their PM&E systems, as well as their capacity-building and technical support needs. The main issues faced by PM&E systems are low budgets, high turnover among technical staff and lack of political support from ministry departments and management. Other areas that need to be strengthened include the annual operating plan, to make it more results-oriented, and impact monitoring, based on a revision of indicators (prior to project set-up, at project start and at present). To make this happen, it is important to conduct advocacy to persuade the institution accommodating the implementing agencies to take on a results-oriented annual operating plan rather than one aimed at measuring outputs and targets.

Unlike the 2004 survey, the one conducted in 2008 found that 80 percent of PM&E systems were designed with a medium to high level of involvement by project stakeholders. Eighty

75. See video on CLAR on the PREVAL multimedia section, <www.preval.org>.

percent of projects claim that their PM&E systems yield information that is used to inform intervention strategies. This finding is significant when compared to the survey of 2004, when the number of projects reporting this was very low. Only half the projects have PM&E systems in place that provide a high level of support to their management structures, in terms of informing their decision-making to improve the project strategy. Few organizational websites provide information obtained from PM&E systems, and few use web 2.0 tools.⁷⁶

LESSONS LEARNED TO INSTITUTIONALIZE PME SYSTEMS

Key factors and successful dimensions

PM&E systems are necessary for public policymaking and evaluation and for accountability, budgetary decision-making and development management. However, for these systems to be developed and implemented in the best possible manner and to be fully institutionalized requires combined action on at least three dimensions: (1) an appropriate organizational framework (a dedicated budget, PM&E units equipped with qualified staff and leadership at management levels); (2) quality data on results and impacts; and (3) a strategy for use and communication of results, with mechanisms in place to feed data into decision-making.

Research conducted in the region shows a high degree of volatility in PM&E systems due to the fact that context affects the organizational consistency of these systems as well as (more indirectly) the extent to which they are institutionalized. Research also shows that the demand for information produced by PM&E systems somehow ensures that they become institutionalized, but this demand needs to be created and encouraged. There is also a need to raise awareness among high-level authorities regarding the value of PM&Es for achieving impact and the need to invest in measurements, especially at the start, middle and end of the project implementation cycle.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation

Although the concept of participation has been present in the development agenda since the 1970s, a new approach to project evaluation is now advocated. It is based on negotiation and consensus building among all the parties involved to secure shared commitments and responsibilities in terms of management and results. According to this approach, participation in evaluation is not only a matter of involving or consulting people occasionally but rather involving them in decision-making.

This new emphasis is clearly expressed in the opportunities for data collection, analysis and use targeted mainly at the beneficiary population through local governments, in line with their culture. It involves giving a whole new dimension to the role of projects as facilitators striving to open up opportunities and contribute to achieve the vision and mission of target groups. In M&E, it means opening up spaces for organizations, communities, groups and individuals addressed by the project to play a leading role, enabling them to produce evidence of change by using tools tailored to their culture.

76. A project run by PREVAL and funded by IFAD's IMI fund expects to increase the use of web 2.0 tools.

How to involve different stakeholders

For an M&E system to maximize its potential as a learning mechanism, both its development and its use processes need to be participatory, by involving different stakeholders and their diverse concerns. Broadly speaking, any organizational activity involves a variety of actors who are likely to have diverse interests and stakes with regard to M&E systems. For instance, a social organization might expect an M&E system to create lessons that will help improve its current or future undertakings, allowing it to improve its relative standing and competitiveness vis-à-vis donors and increase its ability to secure additional funding to sustain its activities. Donors might expect that an M&E system will allow them to determine whether projects are being implemented according to the terms and conditions agreed and whether their resources are being used to obtain the expected outcomes and impacts. Public bodies (for instance, governments) might expect an M&E system to make it easier to fulfil their commitment to be accountable for their performance and use of budgets.

Success factors⁷⁷

- Political willpower to set up an M&E system oriented to impact and learning, that is to say, a participatory M&E system;
- A participatory approach to design and implementation, involving people from different stakeholder groups (representing gender, age, ethnicity, etc.);
- Inspiring stakeholders to become involved in the development of a M&E system;
- Conceptual and operational clarity of the project;
- Quality change objectives expressed in chains of change and logical models, particularly with regard to developing outcome and impact indicators, as well as a clearly defined project strategy;
- Stakeholder analysis that identifies M&E stakeholders and users and their information needs, including a clear definition of results expected by each stakeholder and feedback on implementation resulting from using the system;
- Formulation of simple, flexible, innovative, suitable tools and instruments to address the needs of each stakeholder group;
- Dissemination of results in forms that are suitable for each audience and its learning needs.

77. These elements emerged from an internal workshop promoted by PREVAL, 'Guidelines for Preparing a Guide on Capacity Building in Monitoring and Evaluation'. It was held in February 2006 and attended by six members of PREVAL's evaluators' community.