

## **Shifting the Power in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&EL): An Exposition of ‘Reciprocal M&EL’ in Development Programming**

### **Abstract**

The field of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&EL) in development practice has experienced considerable evolution; however, persisting top-down approaches, characterised by inflexible tools and templates, continue to undermine the autonomy and agency of local communities, often excluding them from the evaluation process. This paper challenges current international development M&EL practice by proposing a radical shift towards *Reciprocal* Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. In this innovative approach, local communities and partners take ownership and responsibility for measuring and evaluating change, determining the parameters, terms and conditions in their partnerships and interactions with northern partners. By advocating for Reciprocal M&EL, this paper aligns with the current discourses on localisation, decolonisation and the “Shift the power” movement, aiming to transform the dynamics of development programming. The paper contends that traditional M&EL practices are laden with paternalistic practices, which necessitate a fundamental reimagining. It calls for the activating the agency of local communities and partners in shaping the methodologies, metrics, and objectives of M&EL processes. Through an exploration of existing critiques of conventional M&EL approaches, this article highlights the need for a more inclusive and participatory model, where the reins and responsibility of M&EL is shared. It presents a theoretical framework for Reciprocal M&EL and proposes practical strategies to empower local communities and organisations in driving the evaluation of development initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Reciprocal M&EL, Shift the Power, Localisation, Decolonising Aid, Local Communities & Organisations*