

Improving country M&E systems at scale: Building capacity of governments to access and use data

CLEAR SA Panel

MOTIVATION:

The need for data based policymaking from reliable and robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems has never been more critical. There is an increase in demand by governments around the world to redirect funding towards data-driven programs. Building the capacity of governments to access and use data can guide strategic planning, optimize resource allocation, and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of development initiatives.

Government's administrative data has a unique value in policy making because of the broad coverage and the level of detail and personal information that the data may hold. The sensitive nature of the content also means that governments need to consider protocols for data security to avoid unauthorized access and use. Administrative data is among the most granular and potentially robust data available to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and schemes. Relative to survey data, administrative data is not prone to social, survey, or recall biases, and therefore becomes a powerful and crucial tool in evidence-based decision-making. Although there is a lot of latent use in this data, it is under-utilized due to a number of constraints, including data quality, completeness, accessibility, and usability for analysis, interpretation, and research purposes.

In low- and middle-income countries, there are significant challenges with regard to accessibility and usability of data, especially when the government is the data provider. Access to data is largely driven by individual champions rather than a comprehensive legal framework or protocols to govern access, storage, transfer and use in a transparent and secure manner. Another barrier is the usability of data in terms of appropriate formats, standardization of data collection process and data quality. Governments of these countries often collect data in disconnected databases and outmoded files, which makes it difficult to merge datasets and to analyze data in any meaningful way. Codes are sometimes not standardized for basic geographical units across datasets which limits the ability of researchers to combine datasets for analysis.

CLEAR SA has been working actively for more than a decade through its government counterparts in India to strengthen the government's capacity to access and use data in policymaking. The panel brings together representatives from CLEAR SA and its partners to discuss what it takes to use data for government decision making in developing country governments like India and effective strategies to build government's capacities. Panelists will share their experiences on working with governments to generate demand for data use. Through reflections on success and failures, the panel will discuss critical factors that need to be in place to set up data driven M&E systems within the government.