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THEME 3: SUPPORTING THE DEMAND FOR ACCOUNTABILITY
EVALUATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY: WHO ARE THE
KEY ACTORS AND HOW TO ENSURE THE USE OF EVALUATIONS?

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

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Background

Governments in Latin America are becoming increasingly interested in the use of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) systems as a strategic tool for collecting information on the results of public management and policy.¹ This is due to the demand for increased effectiveness, transparency and accountability in public administration, and for PM&E systems to be used as tools to help develop and allocate resources based on the effectiveness of the services and outcomes of national development plans and so obtain evidence of what works and is effective. 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 there is an increasing demand for the development and implementation of government PM&E systems, there are also differing views on what constitutes the key to success, i.e., what makes these systems work in an effective manner and be used for timely decision making and for informing citizens at several levels. Experience at a global level shows that PM&E systems work in the best possible manner when they combine at least three dimensions: a) an appropriate institutional/organisational framework; b) quality data on results and impacts; and c) a strategy for the use and communication of results, to be fed into decision-making and inform citizens. These three elements would enable PM&E systems to become institutionalised, thereby allowing changes to become known and be fed into policy strategies, while at the same time enabling to understand these changes and engage the actors involved in the development of solutions.

¹ 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, mid-term and terminal data-collection on an intervention. It also involves reporting in a systematic manner on the intervention’s outputs, effects and the likelihood of achieving the expected impact. It requires uses, users, time, effort and resources and has political, technical and organisational implications.

Both a review of the existing literature and research undertaken in the Latin American region showed the significance of using the results yielded by Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematisation systems. To this end, we looked at the pioneering study by Nuria Cunill & Sonia Ospina (2008),² which was jointly commissioned by the Latin American Centre for Development Management (CLAD) and the World Bank and entailed a comparative study of government PM&E systems in 12 countries in the region. We also drew on some of the conclusions of two research studies conducted by PREVAL on the issues that are likely to influence institutionalisation 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, with the aim 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 policy³ and the other one 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. By addressing for the first time national government bodies responsible for rural development policy, it is sought to obtain a more comprehensive picture, by addressing both central government and territorial levels.

Following is a summary of key aspects of the conclusions arrived at by the Cunill & Ospina research jointly commissioned by CLAD and the World Bank, 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: (i) government bodies at central and national levels; (ii) national government agencies responsible for rural development policy; and (iii) project technical units with a territorial scope. These conclusions will permit shaping future processes for strengthening evaluation capacity in public administration in Latin America and the Caribbean, so that national evaluation systems will be in place in line with the challenges facing the development agenda.

² Nuria Cunill & 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 & 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.

³ The survey researched five countries in the region: Argentina (the General Directorate for Policy Planning and Evaluation of the Under-Secretariat for Rural Development and Family Agriculture – SDRyAF), 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.

1. Participation, use and communication of PM&E results in government agencies

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

A key issue that affects the use of M&E systems involves the potential consequences of M&E results. Where reports are required to be amended, i.e., where there is feedback, it will be more likely that the information will have some sort of real impact on a public administration agency, according to the Cunill & Ospina research.

The accountability purpose that government M&E mechanisms in the region have claimed to be important has still little space for including citizens and incorporating them as users. The survey mentioned above highlights that existing mechanisms for citizens' participation and control are not being used. There is even one instance (SINERGIA in Colombia) where the system has a specific module in place for this, but users' participation nevertheless tends to be marginal and theoretical only.

Finally, the overall conclusion of Cunill and Ospina is that M&E systems have little impact in terms of improving the roles they are intended to measure, be it planning, budgeting, accountability or improvement of institutions and programmes.

2. Participation, use and communication of PM&E in government agencies responsible for rural development

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

- Management Planning and Evaluation Unit (in Spanish, UPEG) as part of the agricultural sector (Honduras)
- National Directorate for Policy Evaluation (Argentina)
- National Directorate responsible for project monitoring, within the agricultural sector (Paraguay)
- Special programmes comprising international aid projects aimed at supporting small-scale farming (Peru and Nicaragua)

Monitoring and evaluation actions are basically conducted using an approach that involves 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 this institution. 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 required to measure and crosscheck indicators. Little work has been done to research the linkages between public systems at a central government level and citizens' participation and supervision during the public policy cycle. Nevertheless,

PREVAL believes that it is at a local level and within the monitoring and evaluation of government and civil society projects that experiences exist that need to be documented, including Citizens' Observatories, Social Audits and Local Committees for Resource Allocation (CLARs), which are often integrated to local governments and organisations.⁴

Overall, use and communication of results as part of public PME&S systems is rare, as results are solely delivered in writing to government data-collection agencies. The following are stated as the main uses being given to data collected: reporting to control agencies (e.g., the General Accounting Office of the Republic); complying with payments and services; reporting to institutions such as the Ministry of the Treasury and Planning Secretariat, etc. Other outputs, such as journals, videos and reports, are generally developed by projects funded by international donors, who will normally provide the resources required for this.

The PM&E function at a central government level rarely has any tools or mechanisms in place to involve users, local governments and rural organisations. 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 do have local consultation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place, including the Local Committees for Resource Allocation.⁵ However, these mechanisms both start and end at a local level, without bearing any influence on decision making at a central government level. In the case of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock (in Spanish, SAG) 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, which has been seized as an opportunity to implement medium- and long-term programmes and plans. However, these same processes are not being implemented either for operational planning or the remaining PM&E sub-systems. Neither within SAG nor, consequently, within the Management Planning and Evaluation Unit (UPEG) is there a culture involving the use of participatory methods in the development of operational plans or monitoring and evaluation actions. This area was self-described by UPEG as initial capacity building.

At a territorial level, based on the data collected at the decentralised sectoral units it may be said that there is a general lack of knowledge regarding monitoring and evaluation issues. The large majority of these units do not have dedicated staff to carry out monitoring and evaluation 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.

3. PM&E in rural development government projects

In 2004, 2007 and 2008, PREVAL conducted three 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 may be summarised as follows: low budgets allocated to M&E, high turnover among technical

⁴ See the section on "Good Practice" on the PREVAL website at www.preval.org

⁵ See video on CLAR on the PREVAL multimedia section at www.preval.org

staff, lack of political support for PM&E activities from the different ministry departments and management. Other areas that also need to be strengthened include the Annual Operating Plan so that it is more results-oriented, as well as impact monitoring based on a revision of indicators (prior to project setup, at project start and at present). To make this happen, it is important to conduct advocacy, to persuade the institution accommodating the project 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 survey conducted in 2008 shows that 80 percent of all PME&S systems were designed with medium to high-level involvement on the part of project stakeholders, and only 20 percent with a low degree of stakeholder participation. Eighty percent of projects claim that their PME&S systems yield information that is used to inform intervention strategies. This finding is significant when compared to the 2004 survey, where 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 organisational websites provide information obtained from PM&E systems, and few use 2.0 web tools.⁶

4. Lessons learned to institutionalize PME systems

4.1 Key factors and successful dimensions to institutionalize PME systems

PM&E systems are necessary for public policy making and evaluation, as well as for accountability, budgetary decision making and development management. However, for the development and implementation of these systems to work in the best possible manner and be fully institutionalised the combined action of at least three dimensions is required, i.e.: a) an appropriate organisational framework (a dedicated budget, PM&E units equipped with qualified staff, leadership at management levels); b) quality data on results and impacts; and c) a strategy for use and communication of results, with mechanisms in place to feed data into decision making.

Research conducted in the region shows there is a high degree of volatility in PM&E systems due to the fact that *context* affects the organisational consistency of these systems as well as, more indirectly, the extent to which they are institutionalised.

Research also shows that the *demand for information* produced by PM&E systems somehow ensures that they become institutionalised, but this demand needs to be created and encouraged. There is also a need to *raise the awareness of high-level authorities* regarding the value added of PME&S for achieving impact and the need to invest in measurements, especially at the start, middle and end of the project implementation cycle.

4.2 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Although the concept of participation has been present in the development agenda since the seventies, it now advocates a new approach to project evaluation, based on negotiation and consensus building among all the parties involved, to secure shared commitments and responsibilities in terms of management and results.

⁶ A project run by PREVAL and funded by IFAD's IMI fund expects to increase the use of 2.0 web tools by its projects.

According to this approach, participation in evaluation *is not only about involving or consulting people occasionally but rather involving them in decision making.*

This new emphasis of M&E is clearly expressed in the existence of opportunities for data collection, analysis and use mainly targeted 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 organisations, communities, groups and individuals addressed by the project to play a leading role in participation, to enable them to produce evidence of change by using tools tailored to their culture.

How to involve different stakeholders

For a M&E system to be able to maximise its potential as a learning mechanism, both its development and use processes need to be of a participatory nature, i.e., they need to involve different stakeholders as well as their diverse concerns.

Broadly speaking, any organisational activity involves different actors, who are likely to have diverse interests and stakes with regard to M&E systems. For instance, a social organisation might expect that using a M&E system will create learnings that will help improve its ongoing and/or future undertakings, allowing it to improve its relative standing / competitiveness vis-à-vis donors and increase its ability to secure additional funding to sustain its organisational activities; whilst donors might expect that the setting up of M&E systems within projects or interventions supported by them will allow them to find out 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 that a M&E system will make it easier for them to fulfil their commitment to be accountable for their performance and the way they used their budget.

The essential elements of an organisation with Good Monitoring and Evaluation Practices include⁷:

Success Factors

- Political willpower:¹² A condition or requirement for being able to set up an impact and learning oriented M&E system, that is to say, a participatory M&E system.
- A participatory approach to M&E: Involvement by representatives of different stakeholder groups (represented by gender, age, ethnicity). This is a further requirement or condition for implementing M&E systems.
- Conceptual and operational clarity of the project, and quality change objectives expressed in chains of change and logical models, including a Logframe, particularly with regard to the development of outcome and impact indicators, as well as a clearly defined project strategy.

⁷ These elements emerged from an internal workshop promoted by PREVAL, named “Guidelines for Preparing a Guide on Capacity Building in Monitoring and Evaluation,” which was held in February 2006 and was attended by six members of PREVAL’s evaluators community.

- Stakeholder analysis (identification and definition of M&E stakeholders and users and their characteristics, as well as their information needs). Clear definition of results expected for each stakeholder and feedback on implementation based on information obtained as a result of using the M&E system.
- Inspiring stakeholders to become involved in the development of a M&E system.
- Definition of simple, flexible, innovative, suitable tools and instruments for addressing the needs and requirements of each stakeholder group.
- Disseminates results using communicational forms that are suitable for each audience and its learning needs

Uses information for participatory and timely decision making

- a. Makes timely decisions to provide feedback for the strategy.
- b. The information is used by various actors to make informed decisions regarding changes and impacts.
- c. Provides opportunities for using and communicating results and for participatory decision making.

Short biographical details:

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