# INTRAC

The International NGO
Training and Research Centre

## Occasional Paper Series
## Number 36

# PRACTICAL GUIDELINES
# FOR THE MONITORING
# AND EVALUATION OF CAPACITY-
# BUILDING:
# EXPERIENCES FROM AFRICA

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**October 2001**

# CONTENTS

# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CABUNGO | Capacity-Building Unit for NGOs |
| CB | Capacity-Building |
| CDRN | Community Development Resource Network, Uganda |
| CORAT | Christian Organisations Research Advisory Trust, Kenya |
| DFID | Department For International Development |
| EASUN | East African Support for NGOs |
| IFRC | International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies |
| LFA | Log Frame Analysis |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NGO | Non Government Organisation |
| OA | Organisational Assessment |
| OD | Organisational Development |
| PRIP | Private Rural Initiatives Project, Bangladesh |
| SMART | Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and easy to collect, Timebound |
| SMODS | Sudan Modular Organisational Development Support |
| SPICED | Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked, Empowering, Diverse |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's |
| ZRCS | Zimbabwe Red Cross Society |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

> Capacity-building is a risky, murky, messy business, with unpredictable and unquantifiable outcomes, uncertain methodologies, contested objectives, many unintended consequences, little credit to champions and long time lags (Morgan 1998:6)

Capacity-Building (CB) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) have become two of the most important priorities of the development community during the last decade. The UN General Assembly Resolution (UN, A/RES/50/120 Art 22.) now refers to the 'objective of capacity-building' as 'an essential part of the operational activities of the UN' (Lusthaus et al. 1999:7). Other official agencies as well as international NGOs have made CB central to their strategic goals. This is a welcome development. At the same time, bilateral and multi-lateral agencies in particular have taken impact assessment even more seriously. With political pressures to reduce aid budgets, official agencies are seeking to focus their resources on areas where they can have most impact. Information about impact is required to do this and so international NGOs are increasingly requested to provide evidence of 'value for money' to their back donors.

To take advantage of the recent donor enthusiasm for capacity-building requires that we take seriously the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of these programmes. Traditionally these two development disciplines have tended to operate in parallel with little synthesis between the two. Capacity-building has not rigorously tried to evaluate impact (James 1994 and 1998). People seem uncertain as to what, when and how to monitor when it comes to capacity-building issues. Numerous indicators and voluminous amounts of information have been generated, but have contributed little in the final analysis to programme decision-making or performance (Morgan 1998).

Measuring changes in organisational capacity is certainly not an easy task. Organisations are extremely 'complex, ambiguous and paradoxical' entities and therefore any attempt to measure changes will be fraught with difficulties as Morgan's quotation above eloquently describes. Despite the inherent difficulties, avoiding M&E of capacity-building is no longer an option. Bi-lateral donor agencies like DFID are fond of quoting the adage that, 'if you can't measure it you can't manage it'. Cracknell also points out the danger that unless some evidence of attributable impact of capacity-building programmes is presented, donor support for capacity-building will be severely reduced (2000:263).

## 1.1  Aim of Publication

The aim of this publication is to help NGOs and donors to develop **appropriate, cost-effective and practical** systems for the monitoring and evaluation of

capacity-building. It is aimed primarily at NGO Support Organisations (NGOSOs) providing CB services and donors of CB programmes, both International NGOs and official agencies.

In the past most of the writing about the M&E of capacity-building has either concentrated on recommending the need for improvements in this area or described how difficult it is to do in practice. This publication aims to bring these two lines of thinking together and take them a step further in outlining practical guidelines which readers can use to develop their own systems for evaluating CB. Once we have a clearer idea of how we are doing in CB we can be both better accountable for results to our donors, and also have a basis for improving our practice in this essential field of development.

Despite considerable interest recently in the M&E of capacity-building there are very few sources of information and experience to guide those concerned with developing systems for measuring the impact of CB work. The published literature on M&E of capacity-building is very sparse indeed. This Occasional Paper is seeking to contribute to the on-going debate, by sharing some practical experiences, primarily from Central Africa. It is important to stress that this is practically based, work-in-progress from one region in the world. It is certainly not the final word on the M&E of NGO capacity-building, but it seeks to contribute to the debate amongst practitioners about how best it can be done.

## 1.2 Background to the Publication

INTRAC has been active in both NGO CB and monitoring and evaluation for the last decade. Over the years we have made occasional attempts to bring the two disciplines together, but have been hampered by the lack of systematic opportunity. In 2000 a number of consultancy contracts from UNICEF, CABUNGO and IFRC provided us with the time to deal with these issues in a bit more depth. The CABUNGO work in particular gave us the opportunity to explore the literature on good practice in M&E, and then design for them a system for monitoring and evaluating their CB work. This experience was reinforced by other shorter pieces of work with IFRC and Tearfund that allowed us to experiment with the approach developed in two different CB contexts. It is out of these different experiences that this Occasional Paper is written.

## 1.3 Structure of Publication

This Occasional Paper starts by outlining the conceptual framework which provides the foundation for the M&E system. The 'Ripple' framework is a simple, yet useful, way of conceptualising how CB interventions impact organisations and then ultimately their programmes and beneficiaries. The publication also examines the current best practice thinking in M&E and applies it specifically to the field of NGO CB by drawing heavily on two main case studies where such

principles have recently been applied. The Paper finishes with conclusions and ways forward for the future.

## 1.4  Summary of Case Studies

The publication will draw on three practical examples of the M&E of capacity-building programmes. They illustrate three different types of CB programme in three different locations in Africa. The first is the evaluation of CABUNGO, an NGO which provides Organisation Development (OD) services to NGOs in Malawi; a module training programme for East African consultants to work on OD in Sudan; and the evaluation of a change process within the Zimbabwean Red Cross. The principles underlying these examples, however, are not merely applicable to Africa. With careful consideration of contextual differences, we believe that the guidelines can be usefully applied in different continents.

A short summary of each of the case studies follows. Examples from the different cases will be used throughout the publication to illustrate how the principles can be applied in practice.

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**CABUNGO   Malawi**

CABUNGO is an emerging Malawian NGO which provides organisation development (OD) services to a range of NGOs and CBOs in Malawi. CABUNGO has developed within the context of an NGO Capacity-Building Project funded by DFID and managed by Concern Universal. This project started in February 1997 and CABUNGO has been providing OD services since December 1997. Since inception, CABUNGO has had basic monitoring systems in place to solicit feedback from clients on the quality of interventions and to monitor the development of CABUNGO itself. In 2000, a combination of management interest, board demand and donor recommendation led to contracting INTRAC to assist in the design of a more systematic and comprehensive approach to M&E which was appropriate for a small, young NGO. The examples drawn from the CABUNGO case are taken from the recommendations in the report as not all the recommendations have yet been implemented.

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**SMODS (Sudan Modular Organisational Development Support) - East Africa**

The Sudan Modular Organisational Development Programme was developed by the Tearfund (a UK NGO) as a strategic initiative to strengthen a local resource pool of Organisational Development (OD) facilitators. Tearfund partners in Sudan were experiencing a growing number of organisational issues, but Tearfund themselves did not feel it was appropriate for them as a donor to provide the OD services required. Instead they organised training for a group of independent local consultants from East Africa in facilitating OD.

The training programme was led by a Kenyan resource and training institution, CORAT, with facilitators from two other resource groups (INTRAC and CDRN [Community Development Resource Network]) in the region.  Tearfund was in a funding and support role. The programme was structured around three training modules, interspersed with mentoring support for each participant. The training content focused on developing a common understanding and approaches to OD consultancy, exploring attitudes and personal qualities, as well as tools and skills and the application of theory to real practical and contextual situations.

> **Organisational Change in the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society**
>
> Between 1997 and 2000 the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS) transformed from being in an acute crisis into a vibrant, dynamic and growing organisation. In late 1997 ZRCS had major problems with all but one donor having deserted, staff demonstrating on the streets and hitting the media headlines for all the wrong reasons.
>
> Important changes in the two main ZRCS leadership positions took place in 1998, with the appointment of a new General Secretary and a new Chair of the National Executive Council. Stimulated as a result of their participation on an International Federation of the Red Cross/Crescent (IFRC) workshop on 'Governance' the new leadership embarked on a comprehensive organisational change process for ZRCS. Over the next three years critical issues of governance, vision, mission, strategy, job evaluation and restructuring and constitutional reform were addressed.
>
> ZRCS has invested considerable amounts of time and the IFRC has also invested considerable amounts of money in this organisational change process. The IFRC felt that it was important to take stock and start to systematically analyse what the impact had been. INTRAC was invited to document the change process and initiate the impact assessment process.

## 1.5  Definition of Terms

It is worthwhile to define some of the key terms we will be using:

**Monitoring**
Monitoring is a **continuous** assessment both of the functioning of the project activities in the context of **implementation schedules** and of the use of **project inputs** by targeted populations in the context of design expectations. It is an **internal** project activity, an essential part of good management practice, and therefore **an integral part of day-to-day management** (Casley and Kumar 1987:2).

**Evaluation**
Evaluation is a **periodic** assessment of the **relevance, performance, efficiency and impact** of the project in the context of its stated objectives. It usually involves comparisons requiring information from outside the project - in time area or population (Casley and Kumar 1987:2).

## 1.6  Acknowledgements

# 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 The 'Ripple' Model

To develop an effective M&E system requires a clearly established conceptual framework that shows how inputs are eventually linked to outcomes and impacts. One framework INTRAC has developed to assist M&E of capacity-building initiatives is the Ripple Model.

In its most basic form this model illustrates the three main levels at which you can monitor and evaluate a CB intervention. The **CB intervention** is like a drop of rain which lands in water - the ripples flow outwards to bring about changes at the internal **organisational level** of the client and then ultimately to the **level of the beneficiaries** of the client. The size and direction of the ripple is influenced by (and in turn influences) the **context** in which it moves.

**The Context**

External **Changes in Programmes** with Beneficiaries

Internal **Organisational Changes** of Client

**Capacity-Building Process**

Rick James (2000)
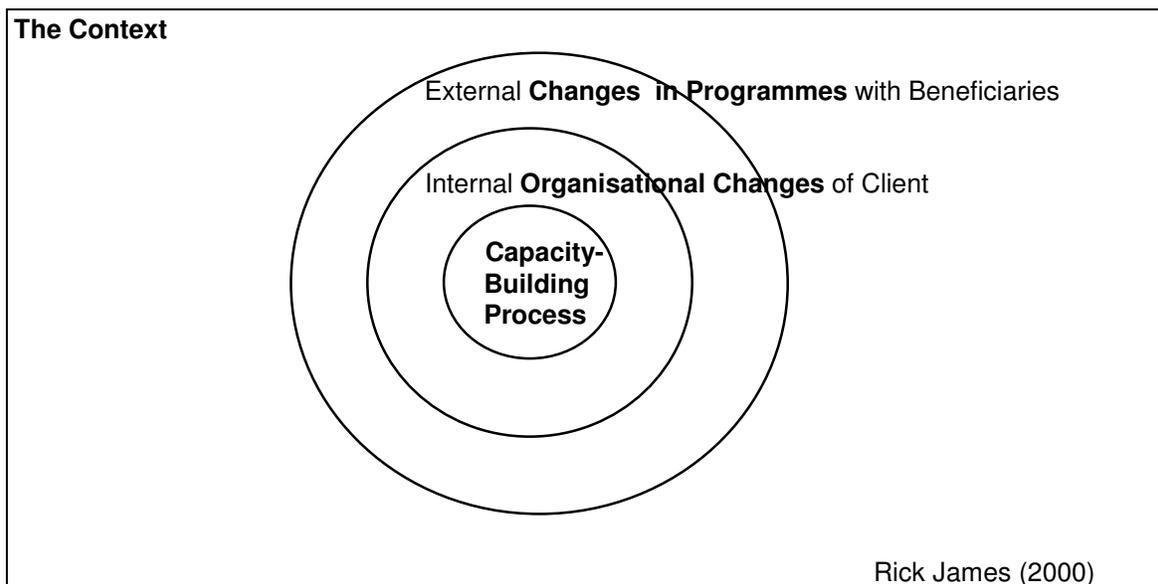
Just as a ripple becomes smaller and more difficult to see the further out it goes, so it becomes more and more difficult to attribute any changes at beneficiary level to the original CB intervention. As Oakley asserts, 'as a project moves from inputs to effect, to impact, the influence of non-project factors becomes increasingly felt thus making it more difficult for the indicators to measure change brought about by the project' (Oakley and James 1999:23). As one moves outwards the less control the original CB provider has on what happens. Obstacles, such as an intransigent programme manager, or 'the cyclone of donor funding trends' obviously can have a major impact on the ripple.

Clearly, ripples take longer to reach further; implying that more time will be required before measurement of impact can take place at organisational level, let

alone beneficiary level. This realisation needs to be built into our M&E time-scales.

It may even be more appropriate to extend this analogy to the drop of CB rain falling into a river as this illustrates better the dynamic nature of the context and the fact that capacity already exists independent of any external effort. As Morgan points out, 'the real impetus for systemic change comes from within organisations. It can be assisted, but not replaced by outside interventions. An effective M&E system must acknowledge and understand this' (Morgan 1999:29).

This Ripple Model seems a more realistic analogy for how change may occur than the traditional linear results chain. In measuring CB it is important to collect information at all three basic levels – the quality of the CB input; the resulting changes in the client organisation; and ultimate impact on the client's beneficiaries. To draw reliable conclusions in an impact assessment, one needs to explore the entire set of ripples.

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**In the CABUNGO case:**

The **monitoring systems** are able to monitor only the inner ripples, namely:
• Quality of OD services (in particular) - the outputs of CABUNGO
• Changes in Clients (partially) - the outcomes of CABUNGO

The **evaluation system** needs to look at the whole picture:
• Quality of OD services
• Changes in Clients
• Changes at Beneficiary level - the ultimate impact of CABUNGO
• Context of NGOs and OD in Malawi
• CABUNGO's own development and the influence of other stakeholders

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## 2.2 Ripple One: Assessing the Quality of the Capacity-Building Intervention

The easiest and most obvious level at which to monitor CB is by looking at the **quality** of the CB intervention itself. The first step in this process is to define exactly what is meant by quality and by whom. In the CABUNGO example, interviews with stakeholders highlighted five critical aspects in a 'quality OD intervention'.

> **Measuring Quality of OD Services in CABUNGO**
>
> • Accurate Diagnosis
>
> • 'SMART', Client-Owned Objectives for the Intervention
>
> • Client Ownership of the Process
>
> • Client Relationship with Practitioner
>
> • Follow-through
>
> Linked to all of these is an overall sense of client satisfaction with the OD service which is, in a sense, an aggregation of all these other five factors mentioned.

It is important that the number of indicators are kept limited, but meaningful. Once stakeholders have defined these indicators, then ways of measuring the different indicators can be worked out. Some common ways of finding out this information are through:

- feedback forms at the end of significant events such as training courses, feedback workshops, or conflict resolution meetings;
- follow-up interviews or questionnaires some time after the intervention;
- feedback files which capture unsolicited verbal conversations or written letters from clients after the intervention;
- analysis of terms of references and contracts for the CB work.

It should be remembered that some CB processes - for example, mentoring and advising - have few dramatic visible events that show up in work programmes or checklists. Some may seem unproductive only to lead to dramatic results in unforeseen places. But they remain a key part of capacity development and need to be captured either in written form or some qualitative way that can give them visibility (Morgan 1999).

In many ways it is fair only to measure the **quality** of the CB process as this is the only part which the capacity-builder can control, and this only to a degree. Any change in the organisation is the responsibility of the client. Cracknell points out that the prime exponents of logical framework analysis, Team Technologies, support this view as they 'consider that project management can only be held responsible for the achievement of project outputs because only these are wholly within their scope as project managers' (2000:116). One CB provider, EASUN, asserts that where the responsibility to implement change lies so much with the client organisation itself, 'the success of OD can mainly be assessed in good consultancy practice' (EASUN 1996:7).

As well as measuring quality, the cost-effectiveness of CB should be assessed. Unit costs and overall '**quantities**' of CB work need to be monitored.

Some new approaches to performance monitoring tend to downplay the value of looking at the quality of inputs (as a result of the undue concern with looking only at activities and inputs in the past), but there should not be a process/product split. According to Morgan, 'indicators must reflect the fact that some of the most important results of institutional and capacity-development are process outcomes, rather than substantive' (Morgan and Qualman 1996:iii). He further adds that, 'most capacity development programmes, particularly in the early stages, have little to show except the implementation of process' (Morgan 1999:7).

And yet the measurement of the **quality and quality** of the CB process is not enough. There is a danger that if one concentrates exclusively on this input level then it provides an excuse to have no impact, but beautifully executed programmes. Capacity-building programmes make a number of assumptions about how changes at one level affect changes at other levels – that quality CB leads to organisational change that leads to improved lives for beneficiaries. These assumptions need to be tested by looking at the next ripples out.

### 2.3  Ripple Two: Assessing Internal Organisational Changes

The first assumption is that CB processes do in fact bring about positive changes in the organisation – impact at the level of the second ripple. Once again, it is necessary to define what exactly is meant by positive changes – what organisational capacities are to be built. It is important that the client organisation takes the lead in defining their own indicators of organisational change. This is essential to encourage client ownership of the CB as well as ensure that the indicators reflect the complex reality as perceived by those closest to the organisation.

There has been significant work done in the last few years on developing organisational assessment tools which identify indicators of 'healthy' organisations. They are useful in outlining areas of potential impact for a CB intervention. Many of these tools include indicators relating to the organisation's:

• learning, openness and ability to manage change;
• identity (e.g. being assertive with donors and able to turn down funding);
• governance (having a board which is involved and committed to making the NGO effective);
• mission (having a purpose which is clear, understood and shared);
• strategy (having clear strategies which guide decisions on activities);
• systems (having established systems for decision-making, communication, M&E, personnel, administration and finances);
• structures (that make sense in relation to the NGO's mission and strategy);
• staffing (having competent and committed staff);
• internal relationships and morale (the staff and management working together coherently and positively);

- financial and physical resources (having adequate resources in both the short and long term to reach the programme objectives).

The better tools take into account the different capacities required by NGOs at different stages of their development. They also take into account the importance of seeing CB in terms of shifts in power. Organisation assessment tools can be useful in the M&E of capacity-building, particularly as a guide and reminder of key organisational capacities. The danger comes with tools that are slavishly followed to the detriment of ownership and meaning to the main stakeholder – the organisation itself.

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**Organisational Changes in ZRCS**

The ZRCS change process set out to improve capacity in the areas of governance and strategy in particular. Data gathering from staff, board members and donors from interviews and participative exercises highlighted not only significant changes in governance and strategy, but major positive changes in other areas too including:

- Organisational Culture
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Networking
- Communication
- Policies and Guidelines
- Donor Confidence and Funding
- Programme Delivery

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A good M&E system has to both continuously monitor and periodically evaluate whether there are changes at this second ripple. Yet it is worth noting again how many other factors come into play at this level. A change in a client may be due to many other 'mediating variables' such as changes in the funding situation, or a change of leadership that may have a much bigger impact than the CB intervention. As a result it must be stressed that we are looking for **plausible association**, not direct attribution.

### 2.4 Ripple Three: External Changes at Beneficiary Level

Capacity-building of NGOs is not just an end in itself. It is also a means to for NGOs to become more effective. This effectiveness is judged in terms of improving the well-being of poor people. Many stakeholders, but particularly donors, are concerned that changes resulting from CB interventions remain at the organisational level and are never translated into changes at the level of beneficiaries. An effective M&E system of CB must therefore attempt also look at the **ultimate impact on beneficiaries**. Alan Fowler advocates that one should start with (or at least pay equal attention to) the outer ripples because this focuses NGOs on the ultimate aim of the CB. It encourages them to take on

board the measures used by poor people to assess change in their lives and the role/contribution of the capacity-builder's clients to this.[1]

CDRN in Uganda has managed to do this in a fairly cost effective way by finding out from the NGO what differences it thought it had made in the community as a result of the CB intervention. It then visit the community to seek beneficiaries' views on what changes have occurred from their perspective and what they see as the source of the changes.

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**ZRCS Preliminary Evaluation of Impact at Community Level**

In the ZRCS example, Red Cross staff and board members from the various provinces were asked to outline how they felt the internal changes in ZRCS had ultimately impacted upon the beneficiaries. The purpose of this was to follow up this information with verification at community level in the future.

The staff consulted felt that as a result of the governance workshops:
• there was greater beneficiary involvement and ownership in the development of programmes
• beneficiaries have gained more power in the decision-making process
• staff spend more time implementing ZRCS programmes rather than being unclear about what their roles and responsibilities are, or being in conflict with other ZRCS people.

The work on the mission, vision, and strategy improved both the quality of work with the beneficiaries as well as the quantity:
• the quality and depth of programmes improved as more attention and assistance were accorded to most vulnerable groups, benefits were more focused and less spread over a wide area. Leadership and staff were clearer about their core business and could concentrate on that, rather than get distracted by other needs
• better networking with others meant that ZRCS beneficiaries were able to receive more support from other organisations involved in related fields such as home-based care and education
• the quantity of work which ZRCS was able to do with beneficiaries increased considerably as donor confidence, both locally and internationally, was revived and hence more resources were available for beneficiaries.

As a result of the job evaluation and restructuring:
• beneficiaries receive support in a more timely fashion. With one person clearly responsible, problems are solved rather than passed on.
• staff performance has improved as they spend more of their time on programme work with beneficiaries which has led to more efficient and effective service delivery. Staff performance has improved as job satisfaction, morale, commitment and dedication to duty have increased up as people are clearer about what they should be doing and why and who they should report to. Internal conflict and duplication has been reduced.
• beneficiaries are reassured that ZRCS is able to place professionally qualified people in the right positions

Source: R. James (2001) 'Starting an Impact Review of the Change Process in ZRCS'

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[1] Personal communication December 2000.

## 2.5  The Overall Context

As Roche (1999) clearly asserts, change is brought about by a combination of the activities and the ongoing dynamics of a given project or programme. Any evaluation of CB must look at how the context has affected the overall change:

ACTIONS ——————— CONTEXT
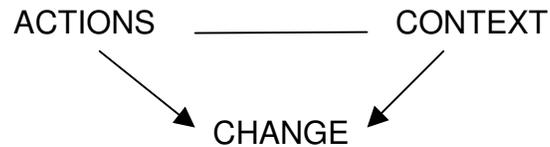
CHANGE

Any change is usually the result of an interaction of a myriad of factors. 'Development and change are never solely the product of a managed process undertaken by development agencies. Rather they are the result of wider processes that are the product of many social, economic and political, historical and environmental factors. Understanding these processes is important if the changes brought about are to be properly situated.' (Roche 1999:25). This means that 'it is usually impossible to attribute these ultimate effects, with any certainty, to a specific piece of training or the influence of a particular expert: they are 'joint products' (Cracknell 2000:263)

Assessing the context is therefore critically important in evaluating an intervention. In an adverse context, sometimes merely sustaining current levels beneficiary well-being is a major achievement. In a more dynamic context apparent changes are more a result of changes in the context, rather than the impact from any CB inputs. The contextual analysis of the immediate and wider socio-political environment can provide the critical parameters against which the impact of a development intervention could be assessed. For example, some of the critical contextual factors which would need to be appreciated in order to understand the impact of NGO CB in Malawi would be 'the youth of sector, donor dependence of the country, donors dictate, lack of clear purpose of NGO sector, weak umbrella, small human resource pool, lack of expertise, capacities, skills, aids - country in social and economic crisis.'[2] In other countries, the critical components of a contextual analysis would be different obviously.

The quality of the contextual analysis of the evaluation can be used as a good indicator of the quality of whole evaluation.   It constructs a detailed understanding, both historically and contemporarily, of the crucial factors which can influence processes of development and change. The importance of the contextual analysis to situate and moderate the impact of the intervention is so critical that some people regard the quality of the contextual analysis as the 'acid test of the quality of the whole evaluation' (Cracknell 2000:127).

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[2] Personal Communication: quoted in R. James (2000) 'Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for CABUNGO', unpublished report.

## 2.6 Adapting the Ripple Model

This Ripple Model can be adapted to fit different CB programmes. Tearfund and CORAT in developing this model for monitoring and evaluating the programme of training for OD consultants to work in Sudan system envisaged their model as:

Partners enhanced impact with the poor

OD facilitators apply their own
learning to their work with partners

SMODs Programme
Three modules + mentoring

Source: Tearfund (2000) Terms of Reference for Evaluation of SMODS.
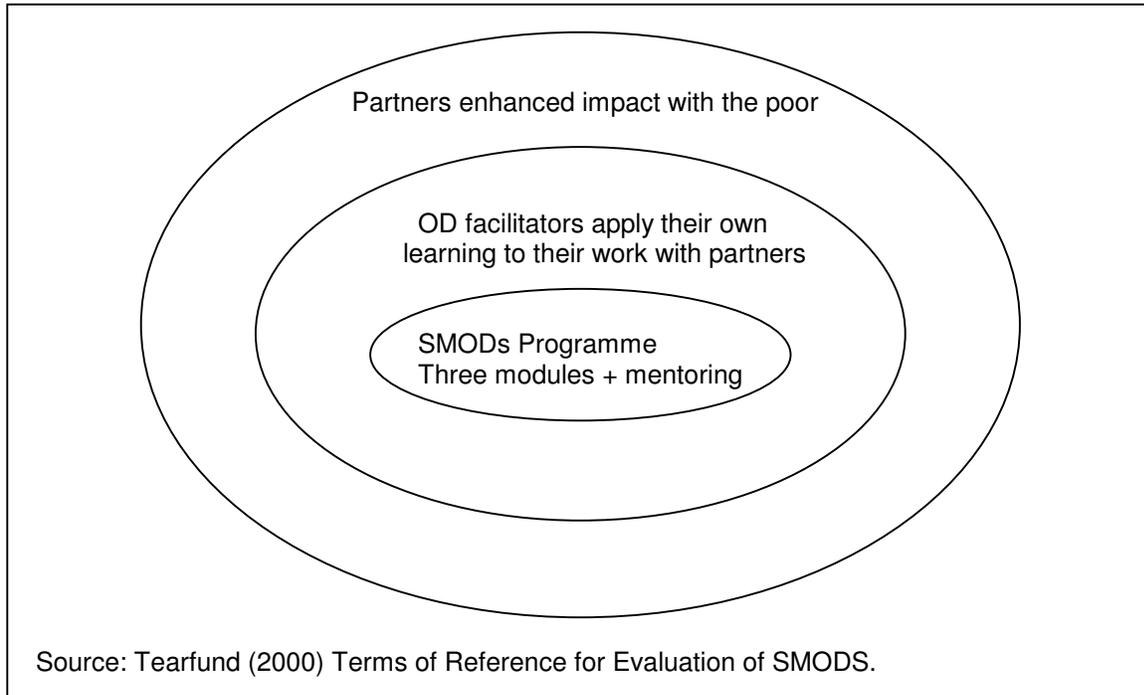
In Alan Fowler's work with PRIP in Bangladesh, some time before the 'Ripple Model' was coined, the following framework was used:

Beneficiary Well-being Change – impact

Beneficiary Organisational Change - outcome

Client Organisational Change - output

OD Process - input
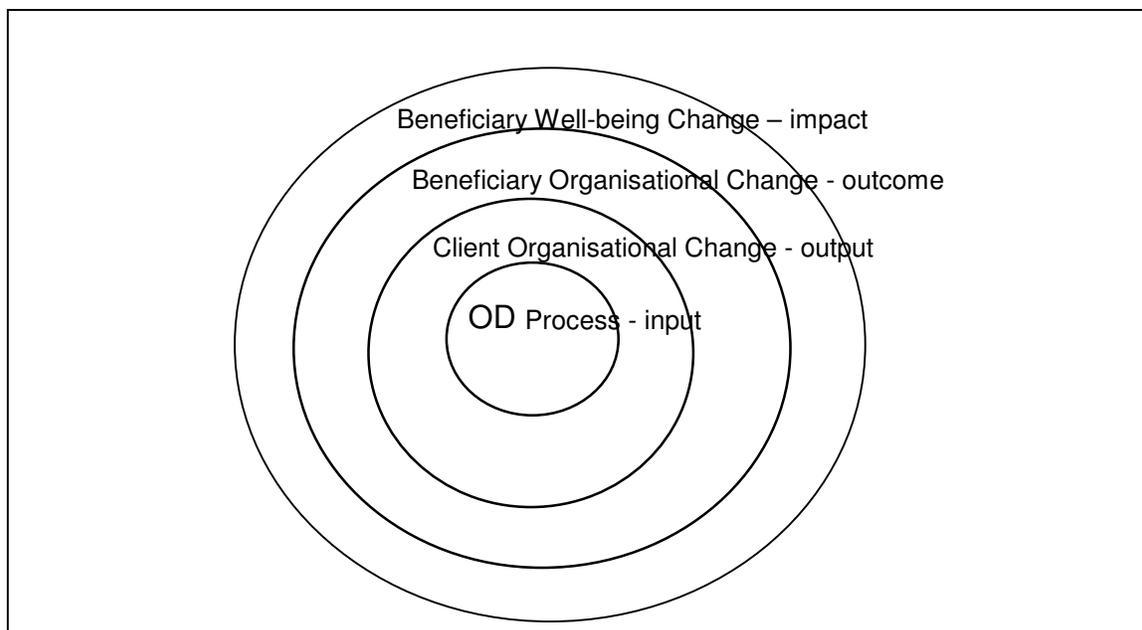
This shows that in one way there is nothing radically new about the Ripple Model. It is based on common sense and many people have been using this framework for some time without calling it 'the Ripple Model'. It merely gives a simple analogy and framework for common sense. One of the advantages is that it does make the **assumptions and process** of a CB programme explicit. It enables different CB programmes to label their own ripples and thereby make explicit their assumptions about how capacity will be built and how this will affect the ultimate beneficiaries. Another advantage is that while most explicit frameworks today follow the linear logical framework analysis (LFA), the Ripple Model is more organic and less linear, 'boxy' and reductionist.

The first stage in developing a system for the M&E of capacity-building, therefore, is to make explicit the conceptual framework for understanding how a CB intervention in one area has an impact on the wider system. The Ripple Model has been put forward as one very simple and adaptable framework. The labels given to the different ripples force one to make explicit the assumptions about the impact of CB which guide the programme. Once this has been done, it is possible to enter the 'murky' waters designing an M&E system for capacity-building with a bit more clarity and structure, yet recognising the inherent complexity.

# 3. GUIDELINES FOR GOOD M&E SYSTEM DESIGN

## 3.1 Accept the Inherent Difficulties

In order to develop a cost-effective and appropriate M&E system it necessary to understand the inherent difficulties that obstruct clear attribution of impact to a CB intervention. By being aware of the problems, It is possible to design a system which, within the resource constraints, does as much as possible to mitigate these problems.

### Definitional:

There are usually definitional issues involved in deciding what is meant by CB. Capacity-building is not a precise term and is subject to endless variations, interpretations and intervention methodologies. For example, just with OD as one particular CB approach, one must ask: How much of an ongoing process is necessary to call it OD? How much of an organisation must it deal with? How many of the phases of the consultancy process must be carried through to be called OD? Can poorly implemented OD, which contravenes the norms of good practice, still be called OD?

### The Problem of Attribution

*'Success has many parents ... failure is an orphan.'* African Proverb (Newens and Roche 1996:7). In the real world, it is often very difficult to say for sure that 'a' caused 'b' to occur. It is likely that a combination of a number of factors have caused the change. Even if one is sure that an organisation is performing better after a CB intervention, it is very difficult to prove a direct causal link between the intervention and the greater effectiveness. In organisations so much is ongoing that single factors cannot be isolated as an independent variable if other variables cannot be easily controlled – 'organisations are very noisy environments' (Walters 1990:219). For example, is greater organisational effectiveness a result of the CB intervention, or of increased funding or a new director?

### The Counter-Factual

Closely linked to the problem of attribution is the issue of the 'counter-factual' • how have changes in the overall context impacted on the effectiveness of the intervention. It might be factors such as recession, war, natural disasters, funding cuts or even internal issues unrelated to the CB. In such cases, it might be possible that although on the surface it appears that the intervention has done little, if it had not taken place the situation may have been much worse.

### Problems of Instrumentation, Access and Research Bias

The need for control or experimental groups is very difficult in CB field research. Organisations involved in CB self-select themselves making random assignment almost impossible. Furthermore, there are very real issues about who will conduct the research and how 'external' they can be. Too close involvement with

CB can lead to suggestions of consultant bias, too distant involvement raises very real problems of understanding and access.

**Timing**
There is also the real issue that the impact of CB can take a long time to see results. If CB is the long-term process (10 years plus) which organisations like USAID and DFID admit it is (USAID 1989), then final evaluative work cannot take place until that time has elapsed.

There is a need to avoid other common problems with M&E systems, that:

• monitoring and evaluation of CB becomes too politicised with different stakeholders wanting to use it for their own ends
• interest in implementing wanes as people grapple with indicators
• the system is too complex and leads to information overload
• learning is seen as self-incriminating. Within a culture of fear and insecurity, error is perceived to be punished rather than as an opportunity for learning.

Being aware of these inherent difficulties makes it more likely to design a system that can mitigate them to some extent, even if they can never be fully overcome.

## 3.2 Recognise the Complexity and Set Realistic Aims of 'Plausible Association'

In developing a system for monitoring and evaluating CB we must therefore keep our feet firmly on the ground and be realistic. The inherent issues can never be fully overcome, only mitigated to a degree. We need to understand the inherent problems, but not be paralysed by them. We have to accept that 'precise measurement and attribution' of cause and effect is rarely possible and never cost-effective. The best we can hope for is '**plausible association**'. We need to develop a 'minimal but effective system which has as its objective the generation of a sufficient, but not exaggerated amount of data and information which will allow capacity-builders and their stakeholders to have a reliable understanding of its outputs, effect and impact' (Oakley 1999). We have to recognise that 'there is no optimal approach ... better practice is about 'achieving fit' in meeting specific objectives of the impact assessment at an acceptable level of rigour, that is compatible with the programme's context, that is feasible in terms of costs, timing, and human resource availability' (Hulme quoted Roche 1999:256).

**Establishing 'Plausible Association' through a Time-Line**

Given that significant changes have taken place in ZRCS, the question in analysing the impact is, - to what degree can these changes in ZRCS be 'plausibly associated' with the different interventions such as the governance training, the strategic planning and the work on job evaluation and restructuring.

One way of obtaining an answer to this important question, without asking directly was through a time-line. At the provincial workshop, participants identified the positive and negative significant events over the last 10 years. Between 1993 and 1997 only negative events were mentioned and one participant referred to them as 'the dark years'.

In late 1997 the first of the organisational change interventions started. From 1998 onwards the graph became much more positive with a number of positive events being mentioned. The events that were noted between the low point of 'the dark years' and the recent buoyancy were:

• establishment of workers committees
• commission set up to examine management/worker relationships
• election of a new president
• confirmation of the new Secretary General
• strategic planning process
• governance training workshops
• staff development programme
• beneficiaries waking up and demanding better services from ZRCS

It was seen that these changes were consolidated by the recent work on:

• programme planning
• development of policy documents
• the restructuring process

It appears that people at a provincial level in ZRCS perceive that considerable positive change has taken in ZRCS. The changes have a multiplicity of causes, but the different change interventions were all mentioned in the time-line. This would imply that the CB interventions played a significant role in the resulting changes in ZRCS.

Source: R. James (2001) 'Starting an Impact Review of the Change Process in ZRCS'.

At the very least, systematically monitoring and evaluating CB programmes will highlight actual changes that have taken place. It enables us to make an informed judgement while recognising the inherent inconsistencies and complexities. It can force us to think through many of the CB issues and ask the difficult questions such as, 'Why do we not see that hoped for change?' that otherwise may have been conveniently ignored. To do this requires persistence and follow-though, avoiding the common danger that 'systems seem to slide inevitably from "extensive attention" to the detail of setting them up, to modest concern for data generation, to less interest in their use and ultimately to a "minimal" interest in them as instruments of evaluation' (Davies 1995 quoted in Oakley et al. 1998)

### 3.3  Be Simple, Systematic and Coherent

It is easy to get carried away with the complexity of the task and design a top-heavy system which produces too much poor quality information and does not justify the expense. The system must be simple enough to be operated locally and fit the local skills available. It is a danger that a system is developed which is understood and workable only by its designer. According to Sebstad, 'overly ambitious designs continue to lead to poor impact assessments' (1998:3). The more complex the process, the rarer the skills needed to make it effective. The system should make maximum use of already existing sources of information and meetings and should not require much training of data gatherers.

Yet there does need to be a coherent system. Monitoring and evaluation should not be merely one-off random exercises, but be part of an overall framework. The two examples below illustrate such systematic M&E frameworks that include a number of different M&E exercises.

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**CABUNGO Monitoring and Evaluation System**:

**Timing:**

It was recommended that monitoring of the OD process should take place at different times.

Request Form ▾    (In)formal OA ToR ▾    Workshop Assessment ▾    Intervention Assessment ▾    Follow-up Assessment ▾

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Entry - Contracting - Data Gathering - Analysis/Feedback - Implementation/Follow-through

Evaluation for CABUNGO is not merely a one-off exercise, but rather a periodic event. The recommended intended time-scale for CABUNGO evaluations is:

Initial evaluation (short-term impact) ▾    Intermediate Evaluation ▾    Post-hoc Impact Evaluation ▾

1997  1998  1999  2000  2001  2002  2003  2004  2005  2006  2007
annual reviews          annual reviews

Source: R. James (2000), ' Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for CABUNGO', unpublished report

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Similarly the SMODS programme had its own systematic time-line for measuring change.

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SMODS Time-line

Date:        During 2000   September 2000     June 2001              June 2004

Measure:  Delivery of     Immediate Impact   Mid-term Evaluation    Long-term Impact
            Modules        - Participant learning  - Application of Participant  -Explore plausible associations
            X    X    X    - Programme delivery   learning to practice         with effect on partners and poor
                                              - Explore plausible associations
                                                with effect on partners
```

In designing an M&E process, therefore, the whole system should be thought through, so that information is gathered at different stages to measure different levels of impact.

## 3.4  Take a Stakeholder Approach

Different stakeholders will have different perspectives about the purpose and value of the intervention. Even within each stakeholder group, there may be different perceptions. It is important to take a more 'interpretive' stakeholder approach to M&E by eliciting the different views of the different stakeholders and bringing them together for negotiation. This recognises that different people will have different interpretations of what occurred in the CB and what impact it had.

This stakeholder approach should be taken throughout the M&E process. As well as stakeholder negotiation during the planning stage which is described in the next section, there is also a need for stakeholder involvement during the analysis and interpretation stage. There should be a forum to bring the different stakeholders together to analyse findings jointly and to negotiate value in a guided way. The DFID review of its NGO CB programme in Nigeria held such a stakeholder workshop, not as a feedback session, but as a means to review findings and consider recommendations. UNICEF guidelines on M&E similarly advocate such a stakeholder workshop 'not only to provide their views, but to contribute to the analysis of the data available'.

The first thing to do is to identify which different stakeholders exist. With CABUNGO, the following primary stakeholders were identified:

```
        DFID, the donor, particularly the Social Development Adviser
        Concern Universal - the Managing Agent
        CABUNGO      - board
                     - management
                     - staff
        Clients      - existing
                     - potential
        Client's Donors
        Other CB Providers
```

Oakley asserts, however, that 'pluralism does not mean that all opinions are equally valid'. What is recommended is 'a pluralist approach which encompasses the widest range of stakeholders, but which clearly prioritises the client' (Oakley et al. 1998:137). Roche supports this belief that 'greater attention must be paid to the views of those who are intended to benefit' because after all, 'significant and lasting change in peoples' lives must take account of their values, priorities and judgements' (1999:28). In the words of Robert Chambers, whose reality counts? Or who counts reality? Power is often in the hands of those who control the decision-making processes around CB investments. 'From an ethical as well as practical perspective, beneficiary control of the aid process makes sense. It is hard to build someone else's capacity' (Lusthaus et al. 1999: 11). It becomes clear that such a client-based approach can succeed only if the donor is no longer the prime driving force and sole recipient of the evaluation.

It is important to note the importance of understanding the power dynamics in any CB intervention. The UNDP advises that different uses of monitoring must be negotiated in a way that is sensitive to issues of power balance and pays attention to mutually exclusive approaches. Monitoring and evaluation systems must create space throughout the process where different actors come together to negotiate value. Even within an organisation it is clear there are power issues - Morgan (1999) claims that CB interventions are 'usually held back by battles over turf, values, identity, power, control resources and blame shifting. NGOs are made up of individuals with different interests. As such they may well conceptualise and measure impact in ways which will perpetuate those interests (Roche 1999:235).

By taking a stakeholder approach it is possible to mitigate the problem of attribution to a degree. If the perceptions of different stakeholders in the process (particularly from the beneficiaries) is positive, then one can get a useful sense of the success of the intervention. According to Riddell, 'it is unnecessary to concentrate time, effort and resources on evaluation if firm conclusions can be drawn without using sophisticated techniques. Similarly if judgements made about the qualitative aspects of projects are not substantially challenged by the relevant actors or groups ... then purist worries about objectively assessing these factors become largely irrelevant' (quoted in Newens and Roche 1996:7).

Obviously taking an 'interpretative' stakeholder approach, which focuses primarily on the views of the client, requires a participatory approach. Such an approach depends on considerable trust to gather good quality information. The staff of the CB programme may have earned the trust of the client, but if the staff does the data gathering themselves, there is the danger of a loss of objectivity as staff may not be impartial. Such an approach is also very demanding of the skills of the facilitators - one Central Asian NGO on the receiving end of such an approach commented, 'both the client and the donor were unhappy with the interpretative methodology as the facilitators did not have the capacity to manage it' (personal communication).

## 3.5  Negotiate Clear Purposes

Each stakeholder has different interests and it is essential, in developing an appropriate system, that these interests are identified and negotiated in the design stage. Different parts of the M&E system will provide information for different purposes to different stakeholders. In any M&E system there are, therefore, a number of different and not always complementary objectives. There is always the tension between the need for accountability for past performance (and use of resources) and the need for learning for future programmes; a tension between 'proving' and 'improving'. Generally donors place more emphasis on the accountability and the client/partner place more emphasis on the learning.

| Accountability | Day-to-day Management | Learning |
|---|---|---|
| Past | Present | Future |
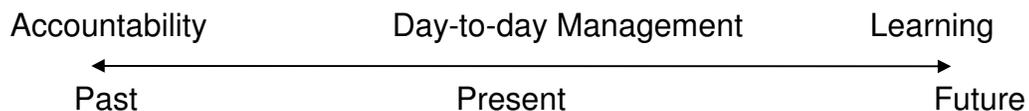
As Cracknell points out from his long experience of evaluation, 'it is not really possible to kill these two birds with one stone and difficult choices have to be made' (2000:55) but goes on to conclude that in reality, 'although combining them will always be messy and unsatisfactory, the resources for evaluation are always limited and so there is little alternative' (2000:99). Most evaluation systems have to try and balance the two - the 'art is to maintain the flexibility in programmes which permit genuine participation, but without sacrificing accountability' (Oakley et al. 1998:139). There has been a recent push towards bringing these two together. MacGillivray points out 'the two approaches are converging - it is just these sorts of mix and match, hybrid approaches to M&E that seem to offer most hope for the next round of learning from development projects' (2000:23).

These tensions can be mitigated to a degree by identifying the different stakeholder interests. The need is to identify what the core purpose of the system is and how the information will be used. Of particular concern to staff in contemplating a future evaluation is whether a funding decision will be based on this. While it is often impossible to insulate an evaluation from such a decision, unless this powerful dynamic is recognised, openly discussed and sensitively managed then it is highly likely to distort ownership and results of the evaluation. It is, therefore, essential to create space at the early stage of an evaluation (or M&E system design) to identify, discuss and negotiate these different agendas to ensure that stakeholders expectations are clarified. In the past this negotiation process has usually been confined to joint drafting of the terms of reference by correspondence which leaves the donor's agenda paramount and the client not owning the process. An initial stakeholder workshop is usually needed to negotiate and prioritise different purposes and create sufficient overlap of interests to allow useful work to proceed. It is also essential to clarify at an early stage what different interest groups mean by impact and what sort of resources are available for this activity.

## Negotiating the Purpose in CABUNGO's M&E System

In designing the M&E system for CABUNGO, interviews with different stakeholders highlighted a diversity of purposes:

1. **accountability for past funding** • the obvious purpose of needing an improved M&E system to provide retrospective accountability to the donor was mentioned - '*DFID wants it as a donor to find out was the project worth the money'.*
2. **contractual obligation** • some felt there was the need to undertake M&E because it was in the plans and original contract. There was an impression that it was needed to *'fill in the tick boxes and get the paperwork done'.*
3. **decision for future funding** • CABUNGO is entering the final year of its five-year DFID funding and it is hoped that DFID will allow CABUNGO to use the considerable unspent portion of its budget after the end of the project period. This funding decision is uppermost in the minds of CABUNGO staff and its board minds as they contemplate the M&E system and was specifically mentioned in the terms of reference for this work.
4. **day-to-day management** • management needs regular information for making decisions, just as drivers and pilots have instrument panels. There was a demand for *'a workable monitoring system which tell us how good the quality of our services are'*
5. **learning to improve OD** *services* • good systems of feedback on the quality of work are needed so that practitioners can improve their OD services to clients in the future
6. **learning to improve M&E** *skills* • developing its own M&E system enabled CABUNGO staff to improve their personal skills and understanding in this area to which they could then offer to clients
7. **learning to improve CABUNGO** *strategy* • the M&E systems needs to help CABUNGO, *'check the relevance of our strategies and the impact of our approach'* and thereby maintain the relevance of services to client needs. Such a system would help them '*to keep the focus on what CABUNGO is able to do well'* and answer such questions as *'how should we position ourselves - should we focus on emerging NGOs or established ones?'*
8. **to develop own systems** • the board see the structural independence of CABUNGO as a key challenge for them and therefore they want CABUNGO to develop its own systems *'we are operating as CABUNGO, not as a DFID project'.*
9. **getting internal stakeholders on board** • The M&E system was seen as a means of bringing the different stakeholders together. For example, some hope that '*the M&E system needs to bring the board on board with what we are trying to achieve'* as they are currently sceptical about the quality of work.
10. **motivating staff** • M&E systems were also seen by staff as important for their own motivation. *'I am particularly interested in seeing whether we are making any difference.' 'Are we really achieving our mission?*
11. **marketing to clients and donors** • the M&E system is needed to market CABUNGO to external stakeholders, '*our long-term credibility depends on documentation of our M&E' .* Management *' needs to know enough to market CABUNGO's services with credibility and confidence'* and to be able to sell services to clients one must be able to convince them '*that you are able to do the job and therefore you need information at your fingertips on impact to sell yourself.*
12. **learning for other capacity-builders and donors** • the M&E of capacity-building is a very hot topic in development circles, but there is a dearth of useful examples for others to learn from. Even within Malawi there are a number of CB organisations that want to learn from CABUNGO in this.

An initial stakeholder workshop, recommended to negotiate and prioritise these different purposes and create sufficient overlap of interests to allow useful work to proceed, did not occur.

Source: R. James (2000) 'Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for CABUNGO', unpublished report.

### 3.6  Ensure the System Evolves

The design of a M&E system should not be seen as a once-for-all event, but as one step in an on-going process. The system needs to evolve over time gradually improving rather than trying to ensure perfection from the start. A process for doing this should be identified. Roche points out that 'it should be the responsibility of **one person** to make sure that the monitoring system evolves and adapts over time, selecting and learning from variations of existing tools and methods' (1999:262). This recognises the complexity of how change occurs and how learning occurs, admitting we do not have the full answer today.

### 3.7  Make the System Decision-Oriented and Integrated

Monitoring is essentially a management information system. Information from the monitoring system must feed directly into decision-making. Monitoring must track progress for management decisions - are we achieving our objectives? Are we meeting our accountabilities? What are we achieving? Where should we put more resources based on the results to date? It is not merely a donor tool for keeping watch over a project, but should be 'designed to meet specific management uses for specific people' (Morgan 2000:27).

But monitoring information 'has to be able to serve two purposes, on-going needs of management and the need to collect data for evaluation' (Cracknell 2000:173). The M&E system should be an integrated, cyclical one, in which planning is linked to monitoring which is linked to evaluation which is linked back to planning.

### 3.8  Take an Inclusive 'Systems' Approach

NGOs operate in open systems. They are not islands themselves but are part of a much longer aid 'chain' by which aid flows from individuals in the North (to governments) to international NGO donors to local NGOs to communities. The ultimate impact is affected by conditions and behaviours of actors throughout the aid chain and it is therefore important in any evaluation to look at this network of influences on the ultimate impact. Morgan clearly states that monitoring and evaluation of CB 'should be extended to cover the actions of all participants including donors and outside monitors; in short all those whose actions and policies in some way shape and influence the programme' (1999:3).

The behaviour of the donor is obviously a very powerful and significant role. 'For the purpose of impact assessment it is important to recognise that the relationship between donors and NGOs can have an important effect on many aspects of organisational development, not least in the psychological health and feelings of dependence on local staff. The knock-on effects of this in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and impact must be assessed' according to Roche (1999:254).

This is supported by Fowler, who points out 'a major problem is that impact measurement tends to take little or no account of the network and flux of contending interests and influences of all the actors involved … the assumption is that all interests are equally shared and aligned along a coherent sequence of relationships linking Northern donors and Southern recipients. Performance is not treated as a co-responsibility of everyone involved' (Fowler 2000:31). He further asserts that through excessive 'projectizing', each link in the chain is guarded by an evaluation 'firewall' which protects higher levels from eventual 'heat' from below and advocates a 'comprehensive systems approach to measuring impact, not a narrow self-protective 'chain' view.'

## 3.9 Ensure the System is Owned by the Provider and Embedded in its Culture

The World Bank's long history of trying to impose CB has led them to the important conclusion that 'the main precondition for the development of an M&E framework is demand' (World Bank 1999:2)

The M&E system should be a part of the strategic management of the programme from the outset. 'It must be part of an effort to embed and encourage an organisational culture oriented to performance, learning and self-reflection' (Morgan 1999:14). Organisations should be prepared to invest significant resources in this process (Roche 1999:260). This is why capacity-builders need to start as early as possible as it 'takes a long time to make any monitoring approach legitimate and operational, particularly if it is participatory ... sustained effort for up to 3●4 years is needed before they can produce credible information' (Morgan 1999:13). Furthermore, there must be sustained commitment as an effective M&E framework cannot be developed overnight. 'It can take at least a decade at the whole-of-government level to embed such a framework in a sustainable manner' (World Bank 1999).

Morgan proceeds to point out that the monitoring and evaluation of CB is 'clearly not a simple activity that can be introduced into a programme with a minimum of effort and planning. Often it requires a change in organisational culture and incentives' (1999:17). The need for incentives is reinforced by von Metzsch who declares that, 'an organisation does not easily change ... there must be an incentive or pressure to learn from evaluation' (1995 quoted in Cracknell 2000:185).

As well as the introduction of incentive systems (however informal and non-financial), there is often a need for some structural support for M&E, such as a separate evaluation unit. At the very least it needs one person who is the internal champion identified to make sure the system is implemented and develops. The identification of a focal person should not, however, undermine the importance of M&E being seen as an integral part of everyone's work and not an add-on luxury.

The systems must be consistent with the values at the heart of the organisation and work in support of the strategy. Concern with learning (embracing error) and performance must be at the heart of the organisation if good M&E systems are to work. They will not work well if seen as bureaucratic or burdensome, even extraneous to the actual work of the organisation.

## 3.10  Be Consistent with Capacity-Building

The system for monitoring and evaluation of CB must be consistent with the CB aim of programme and even build capacity itself. The system itself should promote reflection and learning and be congruent with CB philosophy and values (such as beneficiaries being active participants). For example, in the assessment of the ZRCS case, one of the prime data gathering methods was a participative workshop for regional representatives. Not only was this congruent with the participative approach of the change process, but the workshop proved to be a useful input to the ongoing change process as participants asked themselves the question – How do we take the change process on from here?

It should be consistent too in ensuring that accountability is not just to the donors, but also to the clients. 'Evaluation should benefit the communities engaged in development activities ... as such it becomes an instrument for mutual accountability' (Oakley et al. 1998:135). And yet this presents a paradox for donors. Judgements made about CB are the keys to power and relationship issues - issues related to accountability for resources. It is very difficult for them to allow those who are most deeply and immediately concerned in the activities to be in control of, and have power over, the process (Lusthaus et al 1999:17).

## 3.11  Be Methodologically Sound

### 3.11.1  Use a range of methods

It is vital that any M&E system uses a range of data gathering methods to be able to triangulate and verify any findings. Using a range of methods can help greatly in counteracting issues of attribution. If data is properly cross-checked by different methods, it provides a body of evidence that can be agreed, disputed or amended and which can in turn contribute to a reasoned and plausible judgement (Roche 1999:273).

The ZRCS and CABUNGO examples show how a range of methods can be used:

**Methodology for Initial Evaluative Work with ZRCS**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a cross-section of ZRCS head-office leadership and staff; the president and vice-president of the National Executive Council and one of the consultants involved.

This was complemented by a provincial perspective from a participative workshop with provincial representatives e.g. provincial board members, programme officers, youth leaders and youth members. At this workshop a number of participative exercises were used including:

- Capacity-Ranking of ZRCS in which participants identified ten aspects of a healthy Red Cross Society. They then ranked themselves using a non-numerical scoring system before and after the change process. This outlined the key changes that had occurred.
- A Time-Line of ZRCS which allowed the intervention to be situated within a longer historical time frame. This helped indicate the role and significance the interventions as well as that of other actors and events.
- Impact Analysis of Interventions at Beneficiary level in which participants identified a full range of positive and negative impacts of the different interventions at the level of the ultimate beneficiaries and justify their statements (these can be cross-checked with actual beneficiaries at a later stage).

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**CABUNGO Evaluation Data-Gathering Methods**

- Semi-structured interviews with two or three staff preferably from different levels in the organisation (it may be that senior staff tend to overplay the changes in the organisation, while junior staff underplay them). For the 'quick and dirty' client assessment this would be the primary data-gathering technique.
- Half-a-day workshop with all (or significant numbers) of client staff would provide more in-depth and qualitative information. This workshop could consist of a number of participatory techniques such as: time-lines impact ranking, satisfaction matrix, and chapati diagrams (see below).
- Focus group discussions with staff (probably excluding the senior management to reduce the influence of power dynamics) would give a useful further perspective.
- Observation of the client during the visit would provide important impressions of capacity and would be useful in cross-checking opinions.
- Case studies are 'particularly useful in complex situations where many variables inter-relate' (INTRAC 1996:52). They are good for exploring qualitative impact such as empowerment and self-confidence; useful for following up results generated by other methods; and can have a wider relevance as communicable. CORAT use two to three page case studies to guide evaluation visits to verify and check other information.
- Any secondary information such as intervention reports and any internal reports of clients would be important to use if available.

Source: R. James (2000) 'Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for CABUNGO', unpublished report

### 3.11.2 Use some form of comparative group

While some experts would argue that 'plausible association requires a good control group and a reliable way to measure or estimate change' (Sebstad

1998:23) others like Roche point out that operational problems make control groups impossible (1999:86). He states that it is impossible to find a control group similar to the group of people benefiting from an intervention, who are subject to exactly the same influences and whose situation mirrors that of the beneficiary group over the life of the project (1999: 33) and even if it were so, withholding support to control groups is not only difficult, but may be unethical.

A better way of gathering comparative information is to compare project and non-project beneficiaries. If non-project groups are also groups which the capacity-builder is hoping to work with in the future, there are less ethical problems and good part of planning. This retrospective method of comparing groups inside and outside the project, limits problems of control group drop-out, though there are still problems.

## 3.12  Mix Qualitative and Quantitative Indicators

To measure changes, some sort of indicators of those changes is needed. Developing such indicators, as with other development interventions, is a far from simple process. In the past there has been a polarised approach to indicators of change. There has been a trade-off between objective quantifiable indicators with little intrinsic meaning and qualitative indicators with high levels of meaning, but very subjective.

Good M&E systems have both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The earlier polarisation of either/or was a false dichotomy. Quantitative studies tend to provide better information about project outcomes, but not impact. They can ask questions such as what has happened in clients; when, where, and how much. For measuring impact one also needs qualitative indicators asking 'What important changes have happened and how are these changes perceived?' Qualitative indicators can be made measurable. A number can be put on anything one wishes by introducing a rating or scoring system which allows for a comparison of data over time and between cases. As the interpretation of the scores is vital, it often needs cross-checking between researchers to make ensure there is a shared understanding.

| Key Competencies | Seed | Seedling | Young Growth | Maturing | Harvesting | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness of OD | | | | | | |
| Skills in OD | | | | | | |
| Self-Awareness as OD Facilitator | | | | | | |
| Confidence in Client Relationship | | | | | | |
| Understanding the Sudanese Context | | | | | | |

The SMODS programme used a non-numerical scoring system of representing competence like a plant with pictures of seeds, seedling, young growth, maturing and harvesting. Participants were asked to rate their competencies in OD using this scale, both before and after the training.

Using pictures was less threatening than numbers which might have given the impression of pass marks, but the scale could quickly be quantified later by giving number 1 to seed, number 2 to seedling and so on.

Similarly with ZRCS, attempts were made to quantify change. The provincial workshop went further to score and analyse the changes which occurred. Initially they outlined the key organisational capacities which any Red Cross society needs to be successful. They then reconstructed the baseline by analysing the situation before the change process in 1997 and scoring ZRCS against these capacities. They then scored ZRCS at present and were able to see which capacities had changed and by how much (see below).

| Organisational Capacity | Scores out of 25 | Percentage Improvement since 1997 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Vision, Mission | 6 $\Rightarrow$ 24 | 300 |
| Strategy | 8 $\Rightarrow$ 23 | 187 |
| Networking | 9 $\Rightarrow$ 24 | 167 |
| Communication | 7 $\Rightarrow$ 18 | 129 |
| Policies and Procedures | 11 $\Rightarrow$ 21 | 90 |
| Finances | 9 $\Rightarrow$ 16 | 77 |
| Staffing | 15 $\Rightarrow$ 19 | 27 |
| Leadership | 16 $\Rightarrow$ 20 | 25 |
| Structure | 16 $\Rightarrow$ 20 | 25 |
| Constitution | 20 $\Rightarrow$ 24 | 20 |
| Volunteers | 17 $\Rightarrow$ 20 | 18 |

Source: R. James (2001) 'Starting an Impact Review of the Change Process in ZRCS'.

As Zadek concludes, 'the polarity of the efficiency versus empowerment approaches to indicators has, thankfully, eroded over time. Those focused on measuring effectiveness and efficiency have recognised that indicators developed by, or at least agreed with, key stakeholders are likely to be more accurate and create less conflict when they point towards problems and shortfalls. Those focused on empowerment have recognised that indicators can be more effective as an empowerment tool where they embody the classical SMART characteristics of a good indicator' (2000:20-1).

Roche (1999) points out that indicators should be SMART and can also be SPICED:

| | |
|---|---|
| **S**pecific | **S**ubjective |
| **M**easurable | **P**articipatory |
| **A**ttainable | **I**nterpreted |
| **R**elevant and easy to collect | **C**ross-checked |
| **T**imebound | **E**mpowering |
| | **D**iverse |

Indicators need to be developed for different time periods. Different criteria are needed for the short-term effects and the long-term impact. Milestones need to be identified for on-going monitoring and to prompt periodic reflection on progress, both on what happened and why.

### 3.13 Use Participatory, Post-hoc Indicators

As we have seen there needs to be a stakeholder approach to the development of indicators. We cannot have 'one size fits all'. Who needs and wants to know what and for what purpose? Who decides on the meaning of the information produced? Different stakeholders will judge success differently and will need different indicators. The indicators for change of organisational capacity have to make sense, have resonance and meaning to the organisations themselves as well as other stakeholders. In addition, it is clear that these indicators need to vary with the organisation involved depending on its unique situation. Emerging organisations will have different measures of capacity than developed ones.

Even when indicators have used a more stakeholder approach, they have traditionally been set beforehand. This way tends to miss unexpected impacts, especially negative ones. Rick Davies has pioneered a shift towards a more open-ended approach (Davies 1995) of setting 'post-hoc' indicators where the indicator of impact is determined after rather than before the event. Davies found that instead of confining people to a narrow range of pre-determined indicators, one could get much better quality of information by simply asking people '*what are the most significant changes (positive, negative, planned, unplanned) over the last period and explain why they have chosen these'*. This is a highly inductive approach in which unpredicted indicative events become the basis for drawing conclusions about results. It turns the telescope around and reinforces power at the bottom.

We need a package of indicators that can give a composite sense of a situation and does not focus on a sole indicator, which may do unexpected harm. Peoples' perceptions may change with the programme. 'It is not unusual to find people more critical of a programme once it is up and running, not because the programme is doing less well, but because it has helped people achieve an awareness that yet more could be done with and for them' (James 2000). For

example, if an NGO says 'we made the change ourselves' this is an indicator of authentic client-owned CB, not an indicator of failure. Indicators need to be used carefully as part of a combination of ways to capture information. There will always be a deeper debate about their meaning, value and significance among the varied stakeholders - it is not the information generated that is critical, but the interpretation put on it in response to the 'so what'. It should be remembered that organisations are complex political entities and that in any change process however positive, there will always be winners and losers. Capacity-building is a highly political activity (James 2000) so one must beware of over-simplification and misinterpretation.

There is, however, a need to limit the number of indicators to make it operationally viable. Alley and Negretto insist that 'the greatest challenge for planning and monitoring capacity development interventions will be the development of a limited number of simple, meaningful indicators which can be adjusted as necessary in the course of the intervention' (quoted by Lusthaus 1999: 16). Oakley also points out that 'essentially the number of indicators used should decline as the project moves from input - output - outcome - impact' (1999:25),

## 3.14  Take a Pragmatic Approach to the Baseline

In order to measure a change, one must have an idea of the starting-point. Experience gives us 'a strong message from most sources that without some form of baseline, it is not really possible to assess impact' (Oakley et al. 1998:140).

For CB programmes aiming at organisational changes organisational assessments (OAs) are a key part of the baseline • one must first understand the situation and context in each organisation as well as on the sectoral level. These organisational assessments need to recognise the complexity of organisations.

There are, however, numerous difficulties in developing a baseline. First it becomes outdated as programme shifts focus and aims - it is impossible to predict all the information needed by the baseline because these needs will change over time. Second, there are often major difficulties in the analysis, storing and recovering of the information at a later date - people leave. Third, there is usually the baseline problem of 'whose reality counts'. Even when the direct beneficiaries are asked, there is sometimes the problem, especially in CB, that the participants 'do not know what they do not know'.

Almost always then there is a need to supplement initial baseline information with a retrospective baseline. In Roche's 1999 extensive study of NGO impact assessments, he found that all the studies had to reconstruct the past and gather a better understanding of information. The baseline is therefore, not a once for

all study, but an evolving 'rolling' baseline which turns the material collected through monitoring into the baseline for future activities.

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**Reconstructing the SMODS Baseline**

At the end of the third module participants were asked to fill in two forms describing their competencies as an OD Facilitator in the context of Sudan (see section 3.12). One they had to fill in for that day and the other reflecting back on their competencies at the start of the programme. This approach had the advantage that people are often in a better position **after** an intervention to quantify how much change has occurred. Particularly in the area of skills development, at the start of a training programme people do not know what they do not know. It is not uncommon for them to overrate their skills in a particular field at the beginning. A simple comparison of forms filled in before, and after, a CB intervention might even show participants rating their skills to have either declined or remained the same. This may be more a reflection on the accuracy of their rating at the start of the programme than on what they have learned during the programme.

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## 3.15  Address Cost-Effectiveness Issues

Luca Pacioli, the father of double entry book-keeping warned, 'If you cannot be a good accountant, you will grope your way forward like a blind man and may meet great losses' (quoted by MacGillivray 2000:23).

In monitoring and evaluation of CB there must be systems for measuring expenses and costs for obvious reasons of accountability. There is also a need to try and develop meaningful ways to estimate cost-effectiveness. If CB programmes refuse to attempt any form of efficiency and cost-effectiveness measures, they will be very vulnerable in a climate of aid cuts where other sectors are increasingly able to provide such information. As Cracknell noted, 'the difficulty of attributing effects to causes in the field of training is one of the main reasons why most aid donors have cut back or completely eliminated these forms of technical cooperation' (2000: 263).

*There is a need to look at efficiency issues* • Were the objectives achieved at least cost? This can sometimes be done by comparison with alternative ways of doing things in the same context or similar programmes in different contexts.

This does not underestimate the great difficulty in applying cost-benefit to softer projects, particularly CB which does not lend itself readily to economic quantification and there may often be a trade-off between economic efficiency and local CB. As UNICEF points out, 'capacity-building remains a high risk investment; it is an area where there will be greater uncertainty about the causal sequence and expected results … Thus the criteria of cost-effectiveness must be used with care' (UNICEF 1999: 2-21). The results will always be heavily qualified and inherently unreliable. But they are better than nothing, especially when presented in the context of other performance measures. Much greater efforts need to be made in this area.

An initial attempt was made with the ZRCS example to explore the issue of whether it was cost-effective.

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**Cost Effectiveness in ZRCS**

But how cost-effective has been all this time and money invested in such a major change process. In broad terms it seems the financial costs were:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Governance process: | 250k | = $ 8,333 | (@30:1) |
| Strategic planning | 600k | = $20,000 | (@30:1) |
| Job evaluation | 900 k | = $24,000 | (@37:1) |

A total direct cost of over US$50,000.

Set against these direct costs one could compare the financial savings - '*we had lost international donations of about 30 million Zim dollars per annum*' (US$1 million) which would already make it an extremely worthwhile investment.

One could also compare the cost of US$50,000 with extra income generated. Between 1997 and 2000 ZRCS income has increased from Z$40 m. to Z$100 m. an increase of almost US$2 million.

Even taking the local funding for the cyclone alone, the improved reputation of ZRCS and its clear strategy on disaster preparedness and response, enabled them to raise Z$25 m from local donors in cash and Z$45 million from in kind (almost US$1.8 million)

And these improvements could reasonably be discounted over the next ten years! The change process has undoubtedly been cost-effective.

Cost of Change Interventions:  $   50,000

Extra Income generated p.a.  $2,000,000

If a conservative estimate of $1.5 million was used and this was discounted over 10 years the cost/benefit ratio would be 1:300 !

Source: R. James (2001) 'Starting an Impact Review of the Change Process in ZRCS'.

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### 3.16  Address Issues of Gender and Diversity

'The recognition of the need to consider the role of women as an integral part of development has been one of the most significant advances in the last decade' (Cracknell 2000:251). But it has not been matched by an integration of this perspective into many evaluation systems. At best it has remained a general intention, but for authentic integration it needs to be specified in detail. Many development agencies have an explicit commitment to mainstreaming gender issues in their work, but unless they develop systems which are able to measure progress and failure in these areas the commitment will remain at the level of rhetoric. In addition, as Andersen points out, 'evaluation of programmes and projects in gender-specific terms can play a key role in motivating an aid agency's staff to take a more gender-aware approach and thus achieve its policy goals' (1992:191).

After all, Goetz states that in evaluating any development intervention 'the key to understanding how such outcomes are produced is to trace the way institutional structures, practices, and agents embody and promote gendered interests' (Goetz 1996 quoted in Roche 2000:236). With CB interventions gender is a key dimension to asses because gender and diversity issues are at the heart of organisational change and power' (James 1998). Yet some of the specific issues and dilemmas in doing this are illustrated by the example from CABUNGO.

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**CABUNGO and Gender and Diversity**

There are mixed views as to whether CABUNGO's impact should be specifically analysed in terms of its impact on 'gender'. On the one hand, gender has never been an explicit part of CABUNGO's remit and so would it be fair to then evaluate them on it.

On the other hand, '*gender is a major development issue and poverty alleviation issue. We should be more explicit about this*' . Some have asked themselves that by CABUNGO not being explicit *'are we missing out on the most important point here?'* DFID, the current donor, are very positive about gender issues, '*they should be agents of change for gender - as a donor this is one of the strings we attach'*. If it has not been an explicit issue for CABUNGO in the past, maybe it should be in the future. Issues of diversity and regionalism in Malawi should also not be ignored when addressing gender issues.

There are a number of ways in which it might be incorporated at the organisational level, by making gender an explicit part of every OD (and then discounted if not a major issue). Gender and OD are very closely linked and there is often a strong and very important gender dimension to any work involving culture, staffing, leadership and systems. At a programme level, CABUNGO '*should make a deliberate attempt to make clients more aware of gender dimensions of their work'* by asking specific questions on the impact of their programmes on gender.

Another pressing issue for CABUNGO to integrate into its M&E system is **HIV/AIDS**. HIV/AIDS is currently one of the major development priorities in Malawi. This is a major strategic issue for CABUNGO to address and once it decides how it is going to address it, the M&E system should be modified to measure how well CABUNGO is doing in this.

Source: R. James (2000) 'Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for CABUNGO'. unpublished report

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Yet integrating gender and diversity issues into M&E systems is vital. It might also address the problem of current parallel and isolated development of gender and CB and bring about the much needed synthesis of the two.

# 4. CONCLUSION

Effective monitoring and evaluation of CB is no longer an optional extra for CB programmes. To the degree that most NGO CB programmes will continue to be reliant on some donor funding, they will be required to provide systematic evidence of value for money, especially in an increasingly resource scarce environment.

It is also clear that this is no easy task. As Morgan eloquently pointed out, 'capacity-building is a risky, murky, messy business, with unpredictable and unquantifiable outcomes, uncertain methodologies, contested objectives, many unintended consequences, little credit to champions and long time lags' (1998:6). There are always inherent difficulties that cannot ever be fully overcome, only mitigated to a degree. But the complexity of the task should not discourage us from attempting to provide '**plausible association**' between CB interventions and developmental change, even if we have to accept that 'direct attribution' is impossible.

A simple conceptual framework is needed to underpin the M&E process and to make explicit the assumptions under which the CB programme has been designed. The Ripple Model is already proving useful in helping decide what to measure, when, how and why. In its most basic form this model illustrates the three main levels at which one can monitor and evaluate a CB intervention. The CB intervention is like a drop of rain which lands in water - the ripples flow outwards to bring about changes at the internal organisational level of the client and then ultimately to the level of the beneficiaries of the client. The size and direction of the ripple is influenced by (and in turn influences) the context in which it moves. It is merely one framework and as the old adage goes, 'all models are wrong, but some are useful'. If it proves useful, it should be adapted to fit the particular CB programme. If it is not useful then one needs to be developed which better corresponds to one's reality.

This conceptual framework underpins the development of the M&E system. In designing a system that generates information at the different levels, there are a number of principles from mainstream M&E that need to be borne in mind. The guidelines outlined in this document are that the system should:

• recognise the complexity of M&E and set realistic aims
• be simple, systematic and coherent
• take a 'stakeholder' approach to bring an essential diversity of perspectives
• have a clear and agreed purpose
• evolve and change over time with one staff member responsible for this
• aid practical decision-making
• include assessment of the influence of donors and other stakeholders
• be owned by the provider and embedded in its culture

- be consistent with CB
- use a range of data-gathering methods
- mix qualitative and quantitative indicators
- use participative indicators
- take a pragmatic approach to the baseline
- address cost-effectiveness issues
- address issues of gender and diversity

It makes sense that the M&E of capacity-building should be guided by the same principles, which guide the M&E of any other form of developmental intervention. It seems that most capacity-building specialists have hitherto largely ignored the M&E field and that there is considerable work needed to be done in operationalising these principles in a CB context. We firmly believe that it is possible for CB programmes to develop appropriate, cost-effective M&E systems and that the information generated will assist them to improve their services as well as provide some evidence of impact. M&E of CB may be complex and always qualified, but it is possible to obtain useful regular information on performance in CB.

It is important that those involved in CB take monitoring and evaluation of their work seriously. While there are numerous obstacles to generating perfect, indisputable information, capacity-builders can at least point to some evidence of impact, even if it will always be qualified to a degree. There is a desperate need for capacity-builders to experiment with different approaches and systems and to share this learning with others. This paper has tried to be a step in this process, encouraging others to share what one has already done and to be creative and innovative in the future. We have tried to include practical examples of how others have tried to operationalise these guidelines. We believe and hope that by applying and adapting these guidelines to one's own context and organisation then there are possibilities of actual progress in this highly complex and confusing field.

But the learning between the specialisms of CB and monitoring and evaluation is not just a one-way process. If synergy between the two is to be achieved then M&E has a lot to learn from capacity-building.

The field of M&E has not been very much influenced by principles of CB and organisational change. Monitoring and evaluation has tended to be conducted in an 'expert' consultancy manner with consultants flying in to conduct a number of interviews and even participatory exercises and flying out again. The evaluators' judgement is then sent in a report soon afterwards to the donor as well as the supposed 'client'. The main client for most evaluations is still usually the donor. The organisation under scrutiny has not **'owned'** the evaluation process, and is unlikely to own or implement the recommendations. The prime interest of the work is to help answer the question of continued funding, rather than learning to improve performance (though this is often a stated goal). This is why so much

evaluation work ends up as documents on shelves rather than promoting actual change in organisations. If M&E specialists continue to take this traditional 'expert' approach in their systems design and evaluation work, then their beautifully designed systems or recommendations from external evaluations will not be implemented. Even the World Bank and IMF have learned that countries need to take much more ownership of their poverty reduction strategies if they are to be implemented in practice.

Those involved in M&E need to take on much more of a capacity-building approach for development to really occur. Their important interventions need to be guided more by a thorough understanding of the complexities and politics of organisations and organisational and personal change. Development programmes are littered with too many outside experts' opinions and too little deep and lasting change. If M&E is done only for purposes of accountability it has limited relevance for development, except to keep the aid funds flowing. But development is much more than aid. M&E provides vital opportunities for organisations to reflect on their performance, learn from experience and ultimately to change. In an environment which is changing so rapidly all organisations have to learn and change, if they are to remain relevant. M&E specialists must insist that their interventions are designed in such a way that their client owns the intervention as theirs and has their capacity built to implement the changes required. M&E specialists can no longer be satisfied with the outside 'expert' role and process, but have to see themselves much more as facilitators of organisational change in one particular field.

This publication has attempted to contribute towards a more creative synthesis of CB and monitoring and evaluation. Both specialisms are high on the current development agenda, but both must seek to learn from the other if authentic development is to be fostered. The necessary learning will be aided by an open sharing of positive and negative experiences in this area. We trust this publication has been a step in this direction and has encouraged you to explore the impact of your capacity-building work in a practical and useful way.

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