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PARTICIPATORY MONITORING OF A CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMME

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by
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As Programme Managers we are often asked to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that measure the **complex objectives** we are aiming to achieve in isolation from the people who actually do the work. How often are monitoring systems developed by specialist units who are not part of the implementation team? We are all dealing with a tension between doing the work itself and measuring what we are doing. How many times have we all heard, 'If you can do it, you can measure it!' In reality, what happens is we develop monitoring systems that are designed to prove to the funders or senior managers that we are achieving something. We talk of the 'learning organisation' and developing indicators through participation, those indicators being used to help us manage the programme. In reality of course what happens is we get caught up by the huge workloads on our desks and cut corners by selecting a few chosen people to manage the monitoring system developed at the beginning of the programme, who provide the answers we would like to hear as managers.

The Institutional Development of Civil Society in Central Asia Programme of INTRAC (ICAP) has been grappling with these challenges since we began working in civil society development over the past six years. The outcome we were and still are looking for will not only measure the progress of the work, but also provide adequate information for all the stakeholders to get involved in the evolutionary development of the programme.

Our approach to developing a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) System for the ICAP Programme was to develop a system, which would be consistent in its approach and methodology with the purpose and objectives of the programme itself. A key purpose was that the process of developing the M&E system as well as managing it would act as a model and training support for INTRAC partners in the region.

The workshops were planned so that key stakeholders (partners and donor representatives) would have an opportunity to comment on and further refine the Programme objectives, as well as participate in the development of the fundamental elements of the system itself, before many of the activities began. We were characterising the active participation as **Ownership/Empowerment from the following framework**

Participation and Inclusion
Participation must be a basic building block of the approach to PME rather than just rhetoric. It will not be achieved instantly but will increase and deepen as local people gain confidence and become more involved in PME. We can see the process as having the following stages:

The Process of Participation	
Passive participation ⇩	Where stakeholders simply respond to requests for information and have no other role in PME
Increasing involvement ⇩	Where stakeholders volunteer information and express interest in how it is used.
Active participation ⇩	Where stakeholders are involved in deciding what information should be collected, methods used and the analysis of the data.
Ownership/ empowerment	Where stakeholders play a key role in selecting the criteria and indicators for measuring project progress and call the staff to account for the project's performance.

It is very important participation is an **inclusive** process and is not restricted to dominant stakeholders who have the loudest voices. It is essential that the PME system describes the impact on all key stakeholders parties to ensure that there is an **equitable distribution** of benefits and the project does not contribute to inequality which is often at the heart of people's poverty.

The reason for this form of participatory approach was to actively engage key stakeholders in the process and to encourage their ownership in monitoring and evaluating the Programme over the next three years. A hoped for benefit of adopting this approach was that it would model the process of incorporating capacity building and ownership (and by implication sustainability) into the very fabric of the project/programme process. An additional planned benefit was that the development and implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Process would provide a relevant and 'live' example on which to base future Monitoring and Evaluation Workshops for NGO's and NGOSO's in the Region.

The final indicator framework was developed from the output of the three regional workshops in February 2002 by the ICAP Team. From this base the next step to develop a set of tools and agreement on where data would be collected from was planned for May 2002. The May workshop was based around two country workshops held in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and involved a small number of key INTRAC partners. The half-day workshop developed the tools and proposed the data locations, however there was not enough time available to develop more specific question guides for the proposed semi structured interviews and questionnaires.

Collecting data

Following the May 2002 workshop the ICAP team set about collecting data both individually and with partners. This was planned to take two months as it was hoped that we could then have a major review of the data with partners in

September. The data collection process took far longer than envisaged, as it had to be fitted into the already busy schedule of the ICAP Team.

Between August and the end of September the data from the various interviews, semi structured interviews and focus groups was sent to Oxford to put together into the reporting framework. This was done using the QualDM Software package and, following discussion at the Regional Team meeting in September, using with a standard framework. The process was very time consuming as a number of reports had been put together and it took time to classify the information.

Rough draft country reports were produced which have taken the information submitted and produced summaries for each output and country (at this point Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) these were discussed in detail with the ICAP Team and with partner representatives. Specific issues discussed were:
- The content of the summaries and analyses; how much they reflect the core documents
- The validity of the information; does it give an accurate picture of the situation in each country
- The appropriateness of the tools and proposed data locations; is too much or too little information being collected? how can the tools and data collection process be refined?
- Ownership of the data.

The process of developing an M&E System which has the full participation of the ICAP partners has been running for more than a year. It is a challenge and often hard to keep the priorities balanced. It is especially difficult not to fall into the trap of developing and managing the system externally. As we move into the next stage and the onus of both owning and managing the process is focused on Central Asia it will be essential to assess what support is appropriate and necessary and when and how it can be provided.

It is clear that adopting this approach to developing and managing an M&E System is providing some very important lessons and directions or the future of M&E. With the focus now on Capacity Building initiatives and Rights Based Approaches the lessons gained from this work will feed into a greater understanding of how Monitoring and Evaluation Systems can be developed which have methodologies which has the following characteristics:
- the necessary rigor for data to be reliable and credible
- for data to be useful and appropriate useful to all stakeholders – therefore addressing issues of accessibility
- for M&E systems to be balanced and not a burden to those using them (which ends up in them not being used!)
- providing timely information
- for participation by different stakeholders (with a working definition or analysis of different types of participation)

- Ensuring ownership belongs to all stakeholders

It is clear at this point in time that the new generation of M&E System need to be treated as living organisms and not as static frameworks or straitjacket which sucks information out of a project or programme. For this to be the case there must be a greater understanding of the integrated role of M&E as a part and parcel of the process of development as well as an understanding and ability to hold the various elements outlined above in tension.

Collating information
A vital part of the M&E system is the collation and storage of the information once it has been collected so that it is easily available for analysis and other uses.

Basic Monitoring Record Sheets
Each time a monitoring tool or instrument is used, the following information needs to be recorded:

- Tool/Instrument – What method was used to collect information? Source – Who provided the information? – name of interviewee, type of interviewee, number in group etc. Date – When was the tool used? - date or range of dates if used over a period (e.g. weekly diary may have been used between set dates) Relevant indicators – What indicators information was gathered on?

- Results – For each relevant indicator, what did the monitoring process show about the indicator? Make sure that you include negative or no change results as well as positive changes in the indicators. Other observations – Any other observations or results which show some evidence of progress in meeting the objectives but which are not included in the list of indicators.

In addition in order to help establish the chain of evidence and make cross referencing easier, each record should show where the data was collected and have a **unique reference** which will allow cross referencing to this piece of data at every level of the system.

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