

Shifting the power through monitoring, evaluation and learning

Online, 20 July 2022



Introduction

Over the last 30 years, INTRAC has witnessed many positive examples of transferring power and agency to partners in the global South. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is one sphere where much of the language, practices, and power are strongly rooted in the global North. We are still a very long way from equitable partnerships. To get there will mean re-thinking the way that MEL is approached and undertaken.

On July, 2022, INTRAC hosted an online event under the title "shifting the power through monitoring, evaluation and learning". This event formed a part of the celebrations of INTRAC's 30th anniversary. Over 200 participants from around the world joined the 90-minute discussion. This document presents extracts from each part of the event, and provides links to other resources on the intersection between MEL and the #shiftheconomy movement.

Event agenda

- Welcome and opening remarks from Kate Newman, INTRAC Chief Executive
- Four brief talks:
 - Franck A. Sombo on community-led M&E
 - Sophie Kange on culturally and contextually appropriate and effective MEL systems
 - Alison McKinley on knowledge asymmetries and participation deficits
 - Catriona Dejean on Tearfund's localised framework
- Q&A session with questions from attendees for the panel
- Breakout for discussion in groups
- Summary and closing remarks from Catherine Allen, INTRAC Principal Consultant

Speakers and hosts



Franck A. Sombo
(WACSI)
Community-led M&E

Sophie Kange
(DENIVA)

Appropriate MEL systems



Alison McKinley
(Comic Relief)
Knowledge and participation

Catriona Dejean
(Tearfund)

Tearfund's localised framework



Kate Newman
(INTRAC)
Host and introduction

Catherine Allen
(INTRAC)

Summary and closing remarks



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Welcome and opening remarks

INTRAC's Chief Executive Kate Newman welcomed everyone to the session, and introduced its two goals:

- To explore key issues in MEL through the lens of shifting the power for civil society organisations
- To help mark INTRAC's 30th anniversary, and to share the enduring passion that INTRAC has for strengthening civil society



While we've always been interested in and committed to MEL, we've also been thinking more recently about what its role is in actively shifting the power. How can MEL contribute in enabling and sustaining impactful, relevant, inclusive and equitable development or social change and justice?



Read former interim Chief Executive Peter Sargent's blogs on the 30th anniversary of INTRAC, from [December 2021](#) and [April 2022](#).

Short talk 1 of 4: community-led monitoring and evaluation

When we speak about shifting the power, clearly, we are acknowledging to a very high extent that there are power symmetries - and that needs to be addressed.

We are looking at colonial power, political power, institutional power, and we also look definitely at financial or resource power- who has and who does not have the resources. We are also considering aspects pertaining to knowledge power or expert power. Sometimes the evaluators or consultants conducting the process of evaluation are assumed to have knowledge over the people that they are evaluating. We have to look at ways to democratise the knowledge, and simplify access to this so called "technical" knowledge and expertise.

We do not necessarily conduct monitoring and evaluation for the purpose of responding to the needs or the demand of to allocate resources. Change is innate and inherent to every society, group, people or community. We believe that any monitoring and evaluation must benefit the the community that is receiving the intervention. It must be contextually relevant, culturally sensitive; it must be value driven, and community owned.

Any evaluation process that does not add value to the organisation that carries out that process is one that must be disregarded or discarded.

Kate Newman
(INTRAC)

Host and introduction



Kate Newman joined INTRAC as Chief Executive in April 2022. Her previous role was heading up Christian Aid's Programme Policy, Research and Learning Division – an advisory function focused on supporting and strengthening the capacity of Christian Aid country teams.

Franck A. Sombo

WACSI



Franck Sombo is the Head, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning at the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and the Programme Lead for Techsoup West Africa, the Institute's Technology for Development programme.



it is very important that no evaluation or endeavour is conducted or undertaken without regard to the values that drive the community.

Short talk 2 of 4: Culturally and contextually appropriate and effective MEL systems

First of all, we need to understand the whole concept of shifting the power and where we're coming from. The whole concept, in my understanding, is putting the local or the global South in charge of change. There has long been a culture that monitoring and evaluation systems are designed in the North, and "downloaded" in the South. So in a way, monitoring and evaluation has been looked at as a control tool here. A shift will happen when there is trust and partnership, rather than control.

The shift also starts from a kind of thinking, or orientation, that the change is for the people. There is need to have a conscious and deliberate departure from productizing the process. We all agree that governments are taking a projectized model. How do we shift from a model projectized as brief period programmes, to have kind of a gradual, empowering and transformative MEL system that will capture different phases of transformation and development, rather than looking only at numbers and targets?

Short talk 3 of 4: Knowledge asymmetries and participation deficits

The book "Modern Grant Making" talks about privilege as a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group. I would add to that, that power plays out, and is how this privilege manifests intentionally or unintentionally in the way knowledge is produced, consumed and applied in our sector.

I think that inequitable participation weakens the quality of the evidence base of the sector, or at the very least, it makes it incomplete. People looked at evidence-based practice as an objective truth. But it's as subject to the same biases and inequities as everything else. Knowledge is more likely to be used where it's trusted, and trust is best gained through participation and co-production. Inequitable participation may actually lessen the use of knowledge, and ultimately limit pathways to have any impact.

As a sector, I think we have to recognise that knowledge is political and be comfortable with the discomfort that Franck mentioned, and the productive tensions that arise. When different ways of working and thinking come together. These are often the spaces where opportunity for change really happens. We need to put our shared goals for a positive social impact first, and use these opportunities to make more fundamental progress towards a more equitable knowledge ecosystem, which will better enable us to reach these goals.

Sophie Kange
DENIVA



Sophie is a female Ugandan with over 15 years of international development practice implementing civil society strengthening programs. She is the current Executive Director of a network of indigenous organizations called DENIVA.



How can indigenous organisations empower themselves to fit the global context, but also build confidence to actually receive the power that is shifting to them?

Alison McKinley
Comic Relief



Alison started her career as a nurse in the UK, Africa and South America before moving into health programme management. Her MSc in Demography and Health bought her focus more into data, research and learning both as practitioner and commissioner.



Practitioners are researchers and evaluators and many staff to some extent have to play the game to get work, especially private individuals, researchers and evaluators. But there are still ways it can push back sometimes where this work appears to counter best practice.

Short talk 4 of 4: Tearfund's localised change framework

I'm coming here on behalf of many of my colleagues around the world, who I work with in to funds, because what I want to be able to show is some of the pragmatic and practical things that we have been doing over these past ten years to really think about that shifting of the power of our data and what it means to measure transformational change.

Tearfund is an organisation that has worked with partners since its inception over 54 years ago, it's very much part of our DNA, we're very much led by the partner agenda led by the needs of communities.

What does whole life change look like? What does it mean to flourish and thrive in different contexts? And how do we know that the initiatives or projects, the work that we are doing as a partner, or as Tearfund or collectively, is actually leading to that transformational change or poverty reduction? So this started as on a journey to create what we've called the light wheel, which is a framework which we've created to look at holistic change.

We have an example from Bangladesh, where the light wheel has been used, in order to get that ownership, the light wheel has been translated into local languages. The local churches, who we very much work with, are eager to get hold of that data. So we are really seeing communities wanting that data. We've also seen where that data has started to inform conversations that communities are having with local authorities.

Summing up and closing remarks

One of the themes that that has come through is that monitoring and evaluation is not a recent development- it's been part of culture and society across across the world for a very long time. But we've created a system which has asymmetries in it. Cultural, expert power, the financial imbalances, institutional power relations, political and colonial asymmetries are all affecting how we have engaged with monitoring, evaluation, and most critically learning.

That's reflected in a lot of what has come through - an obvious need to challenge those asymmetries. To move away from this idea that it is a North-South transfer of systems, to being much more based on trust and partnership, genuine partnership, and valuing people's perspectives and lived experiences. Even the language that we've created around MEL is excluding many people. We all have a part to play in change. And I think today's session, we've we've heard lots of examples of how this might happen, very practical examples of how other organisations are trying to put that into practice.

Catriona Dejean
Tearfund



Catriona has over 20 years' experience across the private, public and NGO sectors. Catriona is currently the Director of Strategy and Impact at Tearfund, an INGO working across 50 countries, and leads the organisation's strategy, research and impact agendas. She has also been a member of INTRAC's Board of Trustees since 2018.

Catherine Allen

INTRAC Principal
Consultant



Catherine joined INTRAC in July 2019. She has over 25 years' field-to-policy level experience of international development, applying her skills in the context of sustainability, inclusion and poverty reduction across many countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.



MEL is about telling the story of change as a journey, not just about being accountable to the funder.

