

Guidance on M&E for Civil Society Programs

Prepared for AusAID Program Managers

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Table of Contents

Acronyms	2
A note for senior managers	3
Introduction	4
Monitoring & Evaluation at the design stage	6
Monitoring & Evaluation during implementation	13
Considerations for reporting	21
Evaluation and redesign	23
Annex 1: Monitoring and Evaluating AusAID Community Development Programs Initial Discussion Paper	25
Annex 2: Framework for the Analysis of the Quality of Gender Integration in Programs	45

Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
APPR	Annual Program Performance Review
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CDS	Community Development Scheme
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
CPP	Churches Partnership Program
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICR	Independent Completion Report
ILO	International Labour Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	non-Government Organisation
OD	Organisation Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PNG	Papua New Guinea
QAI	Quality at Implementation
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program

A note for senior managers

The following guidance has been developed for program managers who have responsibility for managing programs focused around civil society engagement. It discusses the different M&E requirements for such programs, with particular reference to gender in civil society. The guidance has been developed through review of best international practice (see Annex one) as well as consultation with AusAID staff and program implementers.

There are several key messages in the guidance that have implications for the time and resources program managers require in order to be effective in the management and monitoring of civil society programs. These include:

1. Engaging with civil society is a different approach to aid delivery from other forms of aid that AusAID utilise. The M&E will likewise be different, usually more participative and more concerned with change and improvement over time.
2. Good quality work with civil society takes time. It is not helped by constant changes or new ideas which interrupt ongoing processes. Program managers should be supported to take longer term approaches to civil society programs, allowing processes to develop and seeking results over the longer term
3. At the same time, civil society programs usually change and evolve, particularly as they begin to learn what works, and as they innovate. Contracts and other formal systems need to be able to support such changes, allowing monitoring and evaluation processes to lead to better program implementation.
4. Effective civil society processes are usually built on the foundations of trust and mutually accountable relationships. These take time to construct and need the space for ongoing dialogue to be created. A major emphasis needs to be put on this, particularly in the first stages of program development. Tangible 'results' can only be expected after this development.
5. Good M&E for civil society and gender programs will deliberately seek information from different people and different sources. It can be expected to generate a lot of information that will not be amenable to simple aggregation. Reporting on outcomes should not be equated with simple indicators or bland generalisations. Civil society outcomes need to be understood in context and will vary across locations. Effective M&E will acknowledge this.
6. In order for different perspectives to be heard, and for genuine feedback to be generated, the difference in the power of different stakeholders needs to be recognised. Deliberate steps will need to be taken to minimise these differences and provide opportunities for those with less power to engage in assessment processes.
7. The manager will have to do more than simply receive reports if they are required to make good quality judgements about programs. They have to be part of the analysis process, drawing upon the formal data collection and also informal sources of information. This will take additional time and ideally should involve the program manager in being outside the office, engaged with program implementers and also with those the program seeks to support.
8. In order for Program Managers to manage civil society programs in this way, they will need their managers to:
 - a. support creative and innovative ways of approaching their work;
 - b. model an openness to feedback, genuine dialogue and an awareness of power and gender relations;
 - c. assist with and support adaption of processes and systems;
 - d. make available the necessary time and resources for them to undertake the management of these programs.

Introduction

AusAID supports a range of civil society programs across several countries. These include large scale bi-lateral programs as well as smaller projects focused on particular sectors and programs which support the work of non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

Civil society work is different from many of the other areas of development work supported through the aid program. It explicitly seeks to serve people through enabling them to undertake their own development, relying as far as possible upon their own skills and resources. As such it focused on enabling and empowering processes. The ways things are done, in particular the way in which people are able to control their own development, is as important, perhaps more important, than what is achieved. This holds true for all aspects of civil society programs including the monitoring and evaluation of such programs.

In light of these differences and the challenges it presents for aid management, this document provides guidance for AusAID program managers about how to approach monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for civil society programs. It provides guidance for the AusAID program manager about what to look for (and avoid) at the key stages of a program in order to ensure that civil society processes are maintained and enhanced through the assessment processes. Attention is also given to how gender should be addressed throughout assessment processes.

The guidance has been developed after review of international best practice (see Annex one), which highlighted the specific difficulties of civil society work and the challenges these raise for M&E. Consultation with AusAID program managers and program implementers has also informed this guidance.

The guidance is divided into four sections:

- 1) Section 1 covers design. This section considers aspects of analysis and design which are relevant to M&E.
- 2) The second section focuses on implementation and how M&E should be expected to evolve through this period.
- 3) The next section looks at reporting.
- 4) The final section addresses evaluation of civil society and community development initiatives.

A short section for senior managers is also attached. This short summary is designed to help them understand and assess the resources and skills they need within their program staff for managing civil society programs.

The role of the program manager

While the role of the AusAID program manager does vary across Posts and programs, it is generally true that the manager is expected to manage, not 'do'. That is they are responsible for checking on the overall quality of the M&E system, ensuring the agreed system is correctly applied in practice and then verifying through informal and other means that the M&E system is capturing the important changes and informing program practice.

As is suggested throughout this following guidance, for M&E of civil society programs the role expands beyond this. The program manager cannot manage these programs effectively unless they also engage with some aspects of the M&E process. Nevertheless they remain responsible to AusAID for the management of programs, not the implementation. The program manger should see their role as a bridge, linking effective M&E and the AusAID requirements. For civil society programs this will require some active management and interpretation of one to the other.

A Summary of some key questions about the Monitoring System

Programme analysis and design

- Are you clear about the theory of change and power relations?
- Are you clear why you are engaging with civil society?
- Have you developed relationships of trust with key partners?
- Has there been adequate engagement with relevant individuals, organisations or networks representing gender relations in this context?
- Do you share a common vision with partners?
- Is the initial design sufficiently flexible to allow for future responsiveness to the changing/ emerging context?
- Have you jointly (with your stakeholders) articulated what `success' will look like and created the processes and space to review this together?
- Have you reviewed the program to assess how effectively gender has been integrated?

Reporting and evaluation

- Are you avoiding the over-aggregation of monitoring data, and looking for a variety of ways to for it to be presented?
- Have you taken into account the different information needs that stakeholders may require?
- Is the purpose of any review or evaluation clear?
- Has adequate time and space been reserved for staff to engage effectively in review processes?
- Have proposed evaluation processes (including any team assembled) adequately addressed assessment of gender relations?
- Are plans in place to ensure that review or evaluation findings are fed back into planning?

Implementation and monitoring:

- Does the Monitoring system establish regular ways of seeking dynamic feedback from multiple sources about the benefits, problems and impacts of the intervention?
- Does the system encourage staff and stakeholders to create regular (sense making) spaces for analysing and reflecting on the underlying assumptions or theories of change?
- Does the M&E encourage adaptation and responsiveness to the changing environment so that learning influences on-going activities/plans?
- Does the M&E seek to explore `surprises' and understand the differing effects on women and men and gender relationships.
- Is the system simple, light and useable?
- Is the monitoring and evaluation system CENTRAL to the developmental work providing useful and used information or is it just a technical add on?

Monitoring & Evaluation at the design stage

Good monitoring and evaluation starts at design. Critical to this stage is to ensure the correct building blocks are in place in order that effective monitoring processes can be developed during implementation. Failure to give attention to these processes during design will mean considerable difficulties for later monitoring. For civil society programs, failure to address the following issues prior to implementation may well mean they are never effectively monitored.

The following guidance is not intended to be a complete guide to designing civil society programs. It refers to the elements of such programs which should be considered in order that the monitoring plan is able to be developed and successfully implemented.

1. For design of civil society programs, it is important to situate an analysis of civil society within a broader picture of change and power relations.

Understanding how social change happens in particular contexts is fundamental to how poverty reduction and the achievement of gender equality is approached. Change is usually political, and often powerful interests and distorted incentive systems keep pro-poor gender sensitive change from happening. Change occurs through complex inter-relationships between institutions, individuals, and their physical and cultural environment. This is highly context specific and is the product of a variety of historical economic, social and political processes. By combining an analysis of power, and what keeps change from happening, and an analysis of the factors that motivate and stimulate change, we can begin to paint scenarios for how change might occur in different contexts. Some of the key questions that need to be asked for all programs, including those which try to engage with civil society, are:

- What are the incentive systems, power structures, gender relations and interests that are holding a given situation in place?
- What and who are the drivers for positive change in general, and within civil society in particular?
 - To what extent is leadership (or action) by key individuals in power critical? How might leaders be influenced? What are the key policy and practice changes required?
 - To what extent are broader shifts in ideas, beliefs, and attitudes key to changes in behaviour and practice?
 - What are the opportunities afforded by new technology, ideas, networks and knowledge?
 - What historical examples of change or 'success' in this, or similar, contexts are there that can be learnt from, or scaled up?
 - Who is driving change through promoting changes in rules, incentives, systems and innovation? Or who has the potential to do so? What support do they need?
- People are usually at the heart of change. It is therefore important to understand what motivates, what constrains, and what is required to move from change at the level of a few individuals or communities to larger shifts in norms and behaviour, whether by individual leaders, institutions, or amongst the public more broadly.

The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu

One area that this study looked at was how to strengthen traditional structures, so that they become an integral part of the state structure. They came across a number of ideas for this which included;

- Formally recognising the role of chiefs in community governance, and reinforcing their obligation to respect individual rights, and to work in a consultative manner with their local communities.
- Supporting churches and NGOs to act as facilitators for institutional development in local communities, helping to transfer knowledge and skills required to access government services.
- Revitalising Area Councils by strengthening their role in community development, giving them a stronger institutional base and allowing them to retain local revenues to fund development projects.
- Supporting the Island Council of Chiefs to play a more active role in setting regional development priorities and pushing provincial government to be more responsive.

The report notes that the 'significance of these ideas is that they represent proposals developed by ni-Vanuatu for strengthening the democratic process in a culturally appropriate way.... that would help to counterbalance some of the shortcomings of the formal political structures'. The authors suggested one of the useful interventions that AusAID could make is to create opportunities for such a debate, including helping different stakeholders to develop and articulate their positions.

See: [Cox et al \(2007\) The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu](#)

2. If AusAID is not clear about the reasons for the civil society program then it will not be possible to develop a coherent approach to assessment. Be clear about why you are engaging with Civil Society in the first place.

The role, structure and strength of civil society organisations (CSOs) vary enormously even within countries. The relation between CSOs and the state, and the private sector is also extremely varied. As a result different CSOs will play different roles within any given society and their relative power and autonomy will vary. Therefore any engagement by AusAID with CSOs needs to be based on a clear understanding of the context and existing power relations. This includes having a good analysis of AusAID's own power and the risks as well as benefits for civil society groups in engaging with AusAID.

CSOs reflect the societies and communities of which they are part. Gender, class or ethnic inequalities may be embedded in these organisations. A careful analysis of the degree to which CSOs reproduce or challenge these inequities should be central to decisions about engagement.

Civil Society groups are also wary of being 'used' by donors. Care needs to be taken to respect the mandates and autonomy of CSOs. In some contexts it may even be inappropriate and counter-productive for AusAID to engage directly – or even indirectly - with CSOs.

The key message however is that the program must be clear about why in this particular situation AusAID seeks to work with civil society. Assessment of outcomes is much harder without clarity about this starting position¹.

¹ AusAID is currently developing further policy about engagement with civil society under various programs. If this is unavailable at the time of the design the program manager needs to refer to his/her senior manager to ensure the program rationale is very clear for all stakeholders.

There are some key questions which might help guide the development and design of civil society programs in different contexts:

- To what extent is there an enabling environment for civil society engagement?² What is the relationship between the state, parliamentarians and different civil society groups?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of different civil society organisations in:
 - Giving voice to stakeholders and constituents, particularly of people living in poverty, women and marginalised groups?
 - Providing professional and local expertise and increasing capacity for effective and gender sensitive service delivery, especially in environments with weak public sector capacity or in post-conflict contexts?
 - Promoting public sector transparency and accountability?
 - Promoting public consensus and local ownership for reforms, national poverty reduction, gender equality and development strategies?
 - Bringing innovative ideas and solutions, as well as participatory gender sensitive approaches to solve local problems?
 - Strengthening development programs by providing local knowledge, targeting assistance, and generating social capital at different levels?
- How best might civil society organisations contribute – directly or indirectly - to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, National Poverty reduction Strategies and Gender Equality?
- How best might AusAID either indirectly - through helping to create an improved enabling environment - or directly - through supporting different civil society roles – strengthen civil society?
- What staff, resources or partnerships does AusAID need to effectively engage with civil society in this particular context?

The text box below illustrates the different variety of roles that CSOs play within the health sector, many of these roles, and others, are played by CSOs in various sectors. CSOs can also play such roles across multiple sectors for example through human rights work.

Roles of Civil Society in the Health Sector

- Delivering Health services directly or by facilitating community interactions with service providers
- Piloting innovations and sharing lessons learnt
- Under-taking health promotion, information exchange and building informed public choice on health
- Engaging in Policy setting by representing public and community interests in policy or promoting equity and pro-poor policies;
- Mobilizing resources to finance health services, or building public accountability and transparency for resource use.
- Monitoring the quality of care and responsiveness of service providers by giving voice to marginalized groups

See: http://www.who.int/civilsociety/documents/en/alliances_en.pdf

² See for example the [ARVIN framework](#) developed by the World Bank which is a tool to assess: the freedom of citizens to associate; their ability to mobilize resources to fulfil the objectives of their organizations; their ability to formulate and express opinion; their access to information (necessary for their ability to exercise voice, engage in negotiation and gain access to resources); and the existence of spaces and rules of engagement for negotiation, participation and public debate.

- 3. As part of developing relationships all stakeholders need to come to a shared view about what success will look like. This is unlikely to be possible at the beginning of a new civil society program and must be part of the ongoing processes.**

Once it is relatively clear why AusAID might engage with parts of civil society then building effective relationships and trust is critical. This can take some time and normally evolves as organisations get to know each other. It can therefore be difficult in the early stages of a relationship for complete honesty and openness to prevail, particularly if power differentials between the parties are large. Establishing very specific aims at this stage therefore can be misleading or unhelpful. However agreeing broad outcomes and what 'success might look like' can also be a key step in building common understanding and trust.

At this stage therefore the critical issue is determining how best the people or organisations who are supposed to benefit from this initiative are going to be involved in articulating what it is the program hopes to achieve, and what 'success' would look like. As AusAID requires clarity about objectives to meet the Quality at Entry requirements it is important to determine overall broad objectives at this stage³. Over time more specific objectives can be expected to develop. The program design needs to be flexible enough to enable this development.

The mid-term review of the PNG Churches Partnership Program identified a key reason for its success was the lack of specific predetermined objectives in the original design. Rather three overall outcome areas were agreed between AusAID, the churches and their Australian NGO partners. This allowed each Church and NGO to work together to explore what they could achieve in each outcome area. This flexibility has allowed for considerable experimentation and learning leading to significant change in the churches and in their ways of working.

Churches Partnership Program, Mid- Term Review, Final report. May 2007

Whether AusAID is directly or indirectly engaging with CSOs – for example through a sub-contractor or NGO – it is important that the emphasis in the development of proposals at this stage is on ensuring effective and genuine processes of participation and dialogue, rather than defining detailed indicators and plans. This needs to include ensuring the involvement of different groups of people (based on gender, age, ethnicity etc) – and particularly those whose voices might not normally be heard. In cases where the intervention will be working through intermediaries who may not [yet] have a direct relationship with communities, i.e. research or advocacy groups, it needs to be clear how the interests of those communities will be properly represented and monitored.

³ For design of civil society programs the notion of objectives is best understood as clarity about the overall 'intent' of the program, not as specific statements of tangible results. All collaborations start with some shared understanding of success. At first establishing and monitoring the relationships that allow that understanding to be developed is the most important thing, so there is no point in having more specific objectives at the outset than the shared understanding will bear. But more specific understanding of success (and therefore objectives) will be developed as the activity goes on.

The Stages of the 5 D Approach

The approach to community engagement is referred to as the 5 D approach because there are five steps through which the community is led:

1. **DISCOVER:** Story telling in groups to discover what has worked in the past or what is valuable and appreciated.
2. **DREAM:** Drawing a picture of the ideal school based on what the community is capable of managing. What direction do we want to move towards, how do we imagine it should look?
3. **DESIGN:** Deciding priorities with separate inputs from women, youth and men. In a democratic way choosing together what options there are for getting to where we want to go (based on 1 & 2 above).
4. **DEFINE:** Mapping the available capacities or resources, called assets available to the community through their own networks, lands and skills. What assets exist now - what do we have that we can contribute
5. **DELIVER:** Drawing up an Action Plan to describe: Who will do what when for the whole community?

AusAID PNG Basic Education Development Project: Community Participation Annual Evaluation Report 2008

Depending on the context and the type of change⁴ envisaged, different approaches to defining what success looks like may be needed. In very complex environments⁵ where transformational change is envisaged, this may require focusing on imagining what success might feel like, look like, and smell like in very creative ways. For example imagining the “future backwards⁶” is a technique which deliberately recognises sometimes we need to break with the present to create a new future. A focus on logic and indicators in these circumstances and at this stage might destroy the passion, experimentation and creativity needed in such circumstances.

Whereas in ‘simpler’ environments, or in addressing more immediate concerns where cause and effect are clearer, for example in providing oral rehydration to children suffering diarrhoea, then a clear logical, linear step by step, process based on best practice would be appropriate, and success can be defined quite specifically using indicators.

Domains of Change, Reflective Questions and Indicators

Domains of Change describe broad areas of change that are desired. In complex environments and early in partnerships it is often inappropriate to overly define objectives or indicators at this stage. Domains of change are usually sufficient to be able to test more experimental approaches, not least because prescribing precisely how change is going to occur is not possible.

Reflective Questions are generic questions that are consistently asked at all stages of a program’s life and which reflect the fundamental issues that stakeholders agree are key in monitoring progress. Agreeing these questions and asking them regularly – whilst answering them in different ways – can help provide coherence in diverse circumstances.

Indicators. Indicators are useful in much simpler environments, where projectable change is possible and when partnerships are relatively mature. In more complex environments and when trust is not yet established they can create perverse incentives and constrain creativity and experimentation.

⁴ See Discussion Paper and [paper by Doug Reeler](#)

⁵ See Kurtz and Snowden: [The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world](#)

⁶ For an example see [Simon Zadek’s 2004 paper on the UN and Civil Governance in 2020](#)

4. Theories of change which underlie the civil society program need to match the context and also the analysis undertaken by AusAID and partners.

Once there is broad agreement on desired changes there needs to be a process of determining how best this might be achieved in ways which are consistent with the context and nature of the political, economic, social, and cultural environment, recognising that in many cases defining precisely what you want to achieve, and especially how you will do it and by when, will not be possible at the outset, and will change over time, as relationships and learning evolve.

However, attempting to agree with partners a common theory, or hypothesis, of change is important for at least two reasons: it identifies where there are differences between people, and it also provides a map of how change might happen which can be monitored over time. People often have a very clear understanding of what needs to change and what behaviour should be different in order to bring about that change. By allowing the space and time for this detailed discussion the understanding of how change is likely to come about in a specific context is able to be strengthened and based on real knowledge and experience.

Some times AusAID and CSOs will disagree about what needs to change and how. Such differences should be identified and discussed and in some cases can be resolved or worked through early in the activity. In other situations differences will remain or emerge during the course of the program – this is normal. The design should acknowledge different views where they exist. It should highlight the risks this raises for the activity and how these will be monitored and managed during the implementation stage.

5. The M&E of the civil society program needs to support the approach being taken to civil society by the program. Therefore it is very important that M&E data needs, processes and spaces are addressed as part of the design. In addition this is the point where gender needs to be properly considered and integrated into the design.

The design process for civil society programs should be the start of an on-going participatory monitoring process (see next section) which identifies

- a) What are the major areas of change desired from the perspective of different groups?
- b) What changes do we expect to see over the next period (1 year/18 months etc)?
- c) How will we monitor progress over this period and who will be involved?

It is critically important that these questions are addressed during the design stage, even if the answers change, or are refined, later. In particular it is necessary to create – and protect - the necessary space, time and resources for ongoing reflection, sense-making, learning and adaptation. Activist organisations often prefer to do, rather than reflect. Bureaucratic organisations often put the emphasis on data collection and reporting, and ignore the importance of the collective sense making processes. Both therefore need the discipline and incentives established to create the necessary ‘down-time’ for analysis of and reflection on the monitoring data.

These processes are also liable to be multi-layered i.e. with communities and front line staff; between intermediary organisations and AusAID staff; in AusAID itself; between AusAID and Governments. How the links between these levels are constructed, what overlaps are possible, how findings are collected and shared with others are all important questions to address at the design stage⁷.

⁷ The process of selecting Most Significant Change stories and these being discussed at different levels in organisations, with feedback being provided, is an example of a multi-level sense-making process.

And in particular, gender

Many of the elements of good practice for civil society programs are similar for gender i.e. the need for good contextual analysis, the importance of empowerment and relationships, and the challenges of sense-making and addressing power relations. In addition for gender it is also important to consider the 'institutional' obstacles to progress both within AusAID and within stakeholders. Attention to these areas at the design stage allows for ongoing assessment of change in gender relations over time in programs.

Some key gender questions⁸ for consideration by Program Managers at the design stages include:

- Is the proposed program based on a rights-based social analysis that demonstrates the links between poverty and gender?
- Has an adequate assessment been made of past/current approaches to addressing gender inequality in this context, both in terms of Civil society and in terms of the Institutional context (i.e. the 'rules of the game' at policy level or in terms of norms, ideas and beliefs)?
- Has there been adequate consultation and engagement with relevant individuals, organisations and networks representing women's interests and with particular expertise in gender relations in this context?
- Are the analysis and the assessment appropriately translated into Program Plans and strategies that will enhance gender equality?
- Is there an appropriate strategy in place for strengthening gender mainstreaming, for both AusAID staff and other stakeholders?
- Are there mechanisms proposed for monitoring, evaluating and learning from progress in both institutional⁹ (i.e. organisational policies, staff capacities etc) and programmatic terms (i.e. development outcomes) included in the design of M&E systems?

Some Do's and Don'ts at Design Stage

Do

- *Engage in effective power and gender analysis as key drivers of change,*
- *Focus on building a common vision of change tailored to the local context*
- *Ensure that there is an appropriate and representative mix of perspectives involved, based on the power and gender analysis*
- *Ensure that adequate time, space and resources are built into the design for ongoing reflection, sense-making and learning*
- *Ensure gender is properly considered at analysis and design*

Don't

- *Push CSOs or subcontractors working with CSOs to focus on narrow objectives at the expense of the process and creation of trust*
- *Assume that the design or analysis is correct, it will need to evolve over time,*
- *Instrumentalise CSOs - respect their mandates and autonomy,*
- *React punitively if your policies are challenged by CSOs, try and navigate different views with curiosity.*

⁸ See Appendix 2: for a Framework for the Analysis of the Quality of Gender Integration in Programs

⁹ See Tool 2 on pages 13 and 14 of [CIDA's framework for Assessing Gender Equality Results](#)

Monitoring & Evaluation during implementation

Good M&E systems for civil society programs are ones which are:

- **Dynamic:** Systems which encourage *'learning by doing'* and are promoting regular ways of seeking dynamic feedback from multiple sources about the benefits, problems and impacts of the intervention.
- **Participative and Gender Sensitive:** Systems which actively seek to overcome barriers of gender, age, power, culture and other issues which limit the participation of all stakeholders in the monitoring and assessment process.
- **Reflective:** Systems which encourage staff, partners and stakeholders to create regular space and time for analysing information and reflecting back on the underlying assumptions or *'theories of change'* which underpin the interventions.
- **Evolving:** Systems which are adapting and changing in order to keep them as ***light and simple*** as possible while providing *'real time'* information which informs on-going improvement of the intervention.

These M&E systems do not have to be complicated. They can be based on simple, creative processes and simple basic questions which utilise participatory stakeholder feedback, sound analysis and the use of multiple tools to encourage active stakeholder engagement. However they do require resources and time to develop.

6. Dynamic: the M&E framework must promote regular ways of receiving feedback from stakeholders

Good M&E frameworks encourage dynamic feedback. *'Learning by doing'* is key to most, if not all, environments. Each Civil Society initiative ought to promote ways of seeking on-going feedback from multiple sources about the benefits, problems and impact of the intervention. At the heart of these processes are three key areas of analysis:

1) *What has been done by the Program*

- What were the initial objectives, theory of change, assumptions and initial measures of success?
- What happened throughout the year?

2) *What has changed as a result*

- Who benefited (women/men/class/caste etc) and who didn't?
- What were the intended and unintended outcomes as perceived by different stakeholder groups?
- What were the gender implications?

3) *How should the learning from this process inform forthcoming work*

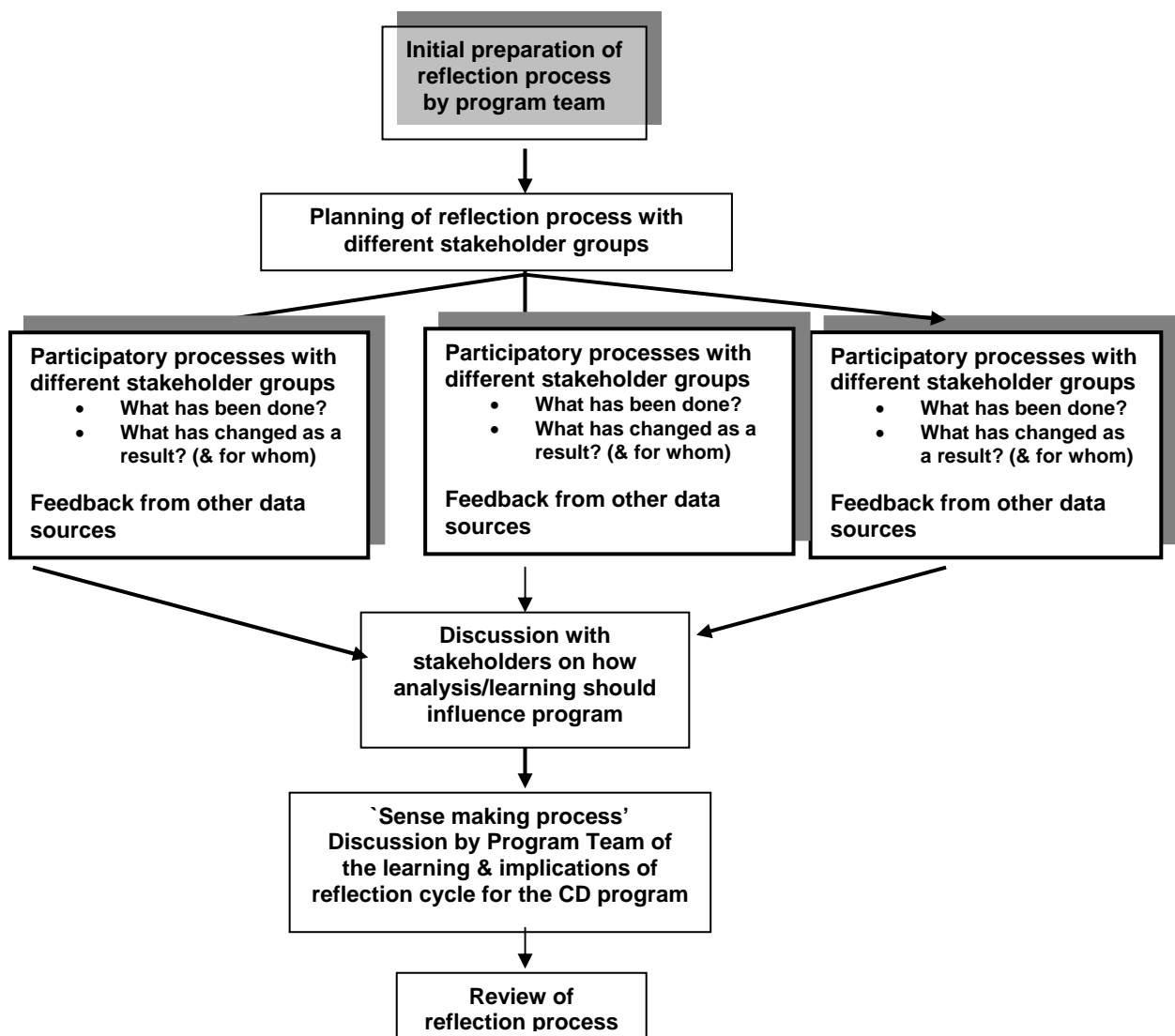
- What are the lessons/learning from the past year?
- How should the on-going plans be altered as a result of these lessons?
- How could stakeholders have greater input into (or involvement in) future activities?

Dynamic feedback processes can take a variety of forms. One form is the introduction of *'Annual Reflection Cycles'*. An *'annual reflection cycle'* is essentially the implementation agency creating *'space and time'* annually to reflect with stakeholders on *'how'* and *'if'* the initiative is making progress towards its objectives or success criteria. Annual reflection cycles provide an opportunity to reflect back on *'theories of change'* or assumptions which guide the intervention, assess progress against *'success criteria'* and involve different stakeholder groups in the analysis.

Use of annual reflection cycles

Each annual reflection cycle will be different depending on the nature, and stage, of the intervention. Multiple data methods, data sources and tools should be used. Some annual processes may involve implementing staff and other stakeholders (e.g. government, peer organisation, bilateral staff) in feedback processes. In other situations, it may be possible to involve primary stakeholders (or their representatives) in participatory analyses of how (or if) the interventions are making a difference to people's lives. Many processes will be multi-layered but in essence they should be kept simple and as participatory as possible (see potential key steps below).

Potential steps in an Annual Reflection Cycle



Other methodological approaches which invite reflective, dynamic stakeholder feedback include Appreciative Inquiry, Outcome Mapping, and use of the Most Significant Change approach. In Appreciative Inquiry the intention is to seek out examples where processes are improving and changing in ways that people consider positive and ask ‘why’ and ‘what can we learn from this?’¹⁰ Outcome mapping focuses on one particular category of results – changes in behaviour of people, groups and organisations with whom the programme is working directly¹¹. Most Significant Change involves the collection of significant change stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff¹².

In addition to processes initiated by AusAID or contractors it is important to establish means by which communities and other stakeholders can provide feedback when it is important to them, as part of a process of empowerment¹³. In this way the monitoring and evaluation process becomes part and parcel of civil society development - rather than a ‘technical add-on’ - because it strengthens the ability of people to hold others to account. For example, complaints handling mechanisms¹⁴ are increasingly used in the humanitarian arena, as well as World Bank programs, and have potential in longer term civil society processes as well.

Citizen Report Cards¹⁵ and Community Based Performance Monitoring have also been used in a variety of contexts to provide means for communities’ to express their satisfaction with development projects and social services, and assess their performance. Other innovations include the work of the International Human Rights NGO Witness¹⁶ who has set up a pilot using the model of You-Tube, called ‘the Hub’, whereby groups and communities can post evidence of human rights abuses onto the web. This illustrates the potential of using new technologies to innovate in this area, and build on experiences using storytelling, theatre and video as alternative assessment methods.

In the Chiefs Project in Vanuatu, the monitoring system is adapted for each location. In some locations a set of three questions are posted on a communal wall, allowing participants to provide their views. In other settings, use is made of the existing informal systems of discussion. The local facilitators also contribute their reflections and observations. A challenge for the program is that people tend to avoid negative reflections. However by keeping the system simple and deliberately seeking different views, the project has been able to surface different perspectives that have been important for ongoing program development.

Whatever the method used to gather information or feedback about how the program is proceeding and what it means for people, there are several components which need to be addressed in the M&E framework for all civil society programs. These include:

¹⁰ H. Preskill and T Tzavaras Catsambas (2006) Reframing Evaluation through Appreciative Inquiry.

¹¹ See [International Development Research Centre, Canada](#):

¹² See [here for MSC Guidelines](#)

¹³ The AusAID commissioned review of Social Accountability Initiatives undertaken in 2006 offers a very useful review of a range of potential methods

¹⁴ [Go to the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource centre for examples and guiding principles for developing and designing a complaints mechanism](#)

¹⁵ See this site for World Banks resources on [report cards](#) and [community monitoring](#)

¹⁶ See Witness. <http://hub.witness.org/>

- Seeking feedback from multiple sources using multiple methods (both qualitative and quantitative) in both formal and informal ways.
- Involving different stakeholder groups in meaningful ways in different forums to analyse the benefits/problems and learning from the intervention.
- Deliberately `seeking surprise' – seeking ways of hearing and understanding the perspectives of different groups & devising processes that consciously seek new information (positive and negative change)¹⁷.
- Devising processes which lead to greater transparency of information about the initiative with stakeholders and result in greater ownership of the initiative by stakeholder groups.
- Creating a process which is simple, invites honesty and is a learning experience for those involved.

A challenge for M&E which focuses on participative and qualitative methods is concern about the rigour or validity of the information. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be useful in seeking to understand a situation but the M&E framework must explain how the information will be checked and verified. Such processes are different for different types of data as outlined below.

Criteria for Judging the Rigour or Trustworthiness of Information

Conventional Scientific Criteria	Qualitative or Participatory Criteria
<p>Internal Validity – the proof of causal relationships</p> <p>External Validity – the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts or groups</p> <p>Reliability – the degree to which the findings could be repeated if the enquiry was done in the same or similar situation</p> <p>Objectivity – the extent to which multiple observers can agree on a phenomenon, ensuring that results are not due to researcher's biases</p>	<p>Length and Depth of Engagement to build rapport and trust in order to gain quality information</p> <p>Persistent and Parallel Observation using a number of observers and stakeholders</p> <p>Cross Checking combining different sources, methods and researchers as well as participant checking</p> <p>Expression of Difference & Negative case Analysis searching out different views and explanations, particularly on the basis of gender or class, analyzing change for the worse</p> <p>Research Diary and peer review making transparent means by which information is collected and analysed as well as its sources</p> <p>Impact on Stakeholders' capacities to know and Act - the process itself should be empowering and developmental and generate new insights for all.</p>

¹⁷ [See Irene Guijt \(2008\) Seeking Surprise: Rethinking Monitoring for Collective Learning in Rural Resource Management](#)

7. Participative and Gender sensitive: In a civil society program we want increased engagement of people. The monitoring process needs to reflect this, enabling a wider range of people to engage in assessment and understanding of the progress of the program itself. However there can be many barriers to such engagement.

An awareness of power and power dynamics is essential in any monitoring process. Without an awareness of power in the process, all tools and approaches can be manipulative, shallow and exclusionary. The monitoring process has to work with an understanding of the many sources of power.¹⁸

When facilitating feedback processes with different stakeholders an understanding of power is essential. Key questions to ask of the M&E framework include:

- How is the process ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable and/or least powerful groups are being heard?
- What `safe' spaces are being created so that women and marginalised groups feel comfortable to tell their stories?
- How is the process being facilitated so that difficult, but honest feedback can be given?
- How is the power of the donors, the consultants, the state and the richer (or more powerful) voices being contained so that space may be given to others to tell their stories and be heard?

Being sensitive to power relations and thinking creatively about how participatory monitoring processes can create opportunities for excluded and marginalised groups to have a voice. This is important in order for those processes to reflect the aims of civil society programs themselves.

And in particular, Gender

An awareness of gender is also critical in monitoring and feedback processes. Attention to different experiences of men and women within community development and other programs is an essential requirement of good quality monitoring. By not actively seeking ways to involve women in stakeholder feedback processes, women's voices can be easily marginalised and/or silenced. Ongoing monitoring and feedback processes should ensure that women's perspectives are proactively sought and that monitoring processes analyse the differing effects of the interventions on men and women. It is important to remember that gender and gender related issues can be considerably sensitive in community development. Key issues to consider include:

- How monitoring processes be timed and/or facilitated so that women are comfortable and able to be actively involved.
- How (or if) women can be involved in monitoring processes in `safe ways' which enable their differing voices and opinions to be heard without putting women in vulnerable situations or subject to recrimination.
- How men can be sensitively and positively involved in discussing the interventions of the program on gender relations?
- How formal monitoring data captures the differing effects of the program on different groups of people?

¹⁸ See John Gaventa's '[Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis](#)' and Valerie Miller and Lisa VeneKalsen's '[A New Weave of Power](#)' and www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/

In most situations, gender-aware M&E involves proactive initiatives to engage both men and women. Separate forums, careful planning and sensitive facilitation are often required for feedback processes to work well. However, it is important to remember that even when women are involved in feedback processes that women differ by age, class, caste, ethnicity etc. An awareness of the gender–power nexus is therefore important¹⁹.

Tsunami response in Sri Lanka: gender watch:

In Batticaloa and Ampara districts in Sri Lanka the Women's Coalition for Disaster Management (WCDM) was initiated by Suriya, a local women's organization. From the middle January 2005 this group has been playing an important role in post-tsunami relief and reconstruction work.

The WCDM also formed an action group called Gender Watch, with local and international non-government organisations. The initiative enables women to report domestic violence, sexual harassment and discrimination to the group. The group documents violations in the camps and distributes the information to international agencies and the government.

A review of the "Gender Watch" after 6 months of operation was requested by the participants and supported by Oxfam Australia. The most important critical success factors were seen as a) this was the only network in the area that was driven, run and managed by local women but supported by INGO's, UN organizations and government representatives, who had decision making authority, b) it provided a platform for discussion unavailable elsewhere, c) it was not a sectoral meeting – most 'official fora' were organized on this basis e.g. on health or water - but looked at all issues that affected women which ranged from shelter, rape and employment opportunities in a holistic manner.

".. we sat in our groups to illustrate how we would like our lives to be in five years time.."

Radhamani Mundari, Orissa, India.

In Orissa, India, the 'DISHA partners for development' has played a pivotal role in bringing people together, motivating and making possible the preparation, execution and review of people's plans in 20 villages of Orissa. There have been four essential elements of the process:

- Supporting groups to analyse their own situations – including analysing power relations existing in every sphere of life – political, social, economic and culture
- Recognising a bias in favour of the marginalised by facilitating a process of poverty analysis
- Using participatory methods to address key issues – using graphs and visuals such as maps, drawings, drama and video to support people to analyse and then address the deep-causes of marginalisation
- Providing space for groups to be involved in planning and monitoring and assessing on-going work

Regular facilitated processes of assessment help up-date the work. The people are centrally involved in this process. "we divided into groups. The women formed into two groups, and the men got into one group. Each of us took different issues to highlighted in Lok Yojana [community plan]. The task was to see how far we had progressed against the objectives set in our plans, the difficulties faced while carrying out our plans and what still needs to be done and who will take the responsibility for taking this forward. Our group discussed the situation of women and whether there had been any changes in the relationships between men and women during this period. We drew pictures of our previous situation and where we are now. There has been some gradual change..." Radhamani Mundari, Orissa, India

See "Shaping our own Destiny: Radhamani's Story".

<http://www.actionaid.org/assets/pdf%5CRadhamani's%20story%20-%20small.pdf>

¹⁹ See [Linda Mayoux's](http://www.lindaswebs.org.uk) website at

http://www.lindaswebs.org.uk/Page1_Development/Gender/Gender.htm

8. Reflective: there has to be time and space created as part of the M&E approach for analysis and 'making sense' of the data.

In most M&E frameworks and guidance the emphasis is on defining objectives and indicators, clarifying data collection processes, and sometimes on analysis of that data. Very rarely is the important process of making sense of not only this data but other formal and informal information, given much attention. It is assumed. And it is assumed to be straightforward. This is rarely the case.

Good M&E systems create, and protect, the necessary space, time and resources for reflective analysis or 'sense making'. Throughout the year it is important for the M&E framework to require that the program team create explicit space for team reflection and analysis²⁰. At these 'sense making' fora, people ought to be encouraged to draw on data from a multiple sources (this includes formal program monitoring data, but also informal feedback/perceptions and analysis of changes in the external environment) to openly discuss:

- What is going well and not so well?
- Is the program doing the right thing in the right place at the right time to make achieve the results it anticipates?
- Is the monitoring providing data that is helpful for analysis?
- How the interventions could be improved?

At one point in the year this 'sense making process' could be linked to an annual stakeholder feedback process. This is an opportunity for all the stakeholders to collectively analyse the information and develop a shared understanding of progress against objectives, learning and the implications for the future direction of the program. This process can link to the Quality at Implementation reporting. See the next section for further discussion.

The value of making time and space for honest, open, reflective analysis should not be underestimated. One of the pitfalls of many M&E systems is the lack of time given to making sense of **formal** and **informal** monitoring data. Civil society initiatives are often responding to complex, changing situations. It is therefore important to make time to understand the present before engaging in processes which seek to engender change.

All sense making processes should end with deciding how the analysis should affect future interventions. What should change? Each program team needs to have the ability to change objectives, revise success criteria and revisit ways of working in line with the thinking and analysis that comes from these processes. The key test of good M&E systems is the degree to which the learning and insights are used.

The ACCESS program in Indonesia focused on enabling the CSOs to become learning organisations. The program collected data using a range of methodologies which included community and organisational 'snapshots', MSC stories, and case studies. The critical step was having CSO and other partners being part of the discussion and analysis of what meaning this information had in terms of key issues such as gender, capacity, community empowerment and so on. Organisations were expected to learn how to learn. In turn they started to move closer to the people and become more responsive to serving communities.

²⁰ The time given to this analysis will be commensurate with the size and scale of the program, but at least two full days is advised for each sense making process

The Won Smolbag Project in Vanuatu has developed its own capacity to reflect on its program and use that reflection to make changes and develop the various program areas. The program has a formal M&E system which focuses around ten performance questions. Each area of the program collects data which contributes to answering those performance questions on an annual basis. The process is supported by a research officer who assists the program staff to consider how they might collect useful information for their area. AusAID provides the funding for this research officer and supported the development of the performance question approach.

9. Evolving: M&E systems for civil society should be expected to be changing and improving over time.

Just as good civil society initiatives should evolve, so should be good M&E systems. Each year the program team ought to spend time reflecting on whether the M&E system is providing pertinent, appropriate data for sound analysis; whether the voices and perspectives of different stakeholder groups (particularly communities and people) are being heard in the annual processes; and how to revise systems to keep them as simple and light as possible while providing `real time` information which informs on-going improvement of the intervention.

10. AusAID requirements: maintaining the principles across programming levels

CSO programs receive funding under various programs from different mechanisms and funding arrangements. AusAID is currently developing guidance for the appropriate level of focus and reporting for each of these variations. In some cases, where AusAID chooses to monitor at higher levels of sector and country programs the responsibility for monitoring resides more directly with AusAID.

Overall however the same principles about good quality monitoring for civil society engagement will apply for sector programs as for individual activities. The M&E needs to be dynamic, participative, gender sensitive, reflective and evolving. The process does not become simpler or more amenable to simplistic aggregated processes for larger or more complex programs.

Some Dos and Don'ts for the Implementation stage

Do:

- *Encourage M&E systems which are seeking regular stakeholder feedback on plans, strategies & performance.*
- *Develop M&E systems which are central to developmental work and organisational learning rather than systems which are technical add-ons driven by performance targets*
- *Ensure an awareness of power dynamics in all processes and make space and time for the most excluded to be heard.*
- *Create adequate space and time for `sense making` processes.*

Don't:

- *Seek standardised information, pre-set indicators or logical frameworks*
- *Create complicated M&E systems which take too much time, cost too much money and don't provide pertinent, up-to-date information to inform on-going decision making.*

Considerations for reporting

11. Monitoring data can lose meaning if it is aggregated and presented in simplistic or rigid ways.

Civil society M&E tends to develop a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data due to the differences between contexts and the particular variations that occur when people begin to take charge of their own development. What indicates effective change in one location will not necessarily be the same in another. But both are valid and important to understand. It is important that a focus on reporting 'outcomes' is not interpreted as meaning that such diversity should be ignored or glossed over.

Good M&E should allow for synthesis of key information - that is, reducing large amounts of information down to key issues and lessons - but should not try to aggregate different types of data simply to provide an easy-to-read presentation.

Likewise forcing data into formal reports and formal styles can undermine the very enabling process the civil society program is trying to achieve. If a community group have struggled to record their achievements and challenges in forms which make sense for them, such as through video, drawing or other creative methods, then it is important to focus on the information, not critique the styles and presentation. It may be that the format usually required by AusAID will have to be changed or varied to meet the possibilities provided by this type of M&E.

12. Not all information is required by all stakeholders in the same format.

While formal reports are usually required for accountability upwards in AusAID and other donors, not all stakeholders will find such reports to be the most useful way to receive information. The M&E framework should allow for the time and resources to present information in other forms that are appropriate to the stakeholders groups. Partner governments may prefer to have information presented to them in short oral presentations. Communities may prefer visual presentations or more creative mechanisms such as drama. The important issue is to ensure that stakeholders are informed about progress in ways that enable them to use the information and contribute to decision making about the program.

If AusAID want to assess progress in civil society programs then it is important for them to engage as part of the sense making processes. Formal reports will not be sufficient for program staff to be able to 'know' if a program is achieving its objectives. This will be a complex and varying judgement to be made on the basis of a wide range of information. Some of that information will be made available through formal reports, but as discussed in the previous section, much will also come from the views of multiple stakeholders, in both formal and informal ways.

By being part of the sense making process the AusAID program manager can then further check on both the quality of the M&E processes and the interpretation and analysis of the data. On the basis of this information and engagement he/she can then have the confidence to complete the documentation required by AusAID such as the quality at implementation (QAI) forms.

13. AusAID requirements: Quality at Implementation

The Quality at Implementation (QAI) processes require the AusAID program manager to make judgements about the activity or program based on the available evidence. Much of this will come from the formal monitoring systems, (although additional information will also come from other sources, such as informal discussion). The program manager can take the opportunity of the 'sense-making' process in the formal monitoring to ask for relevant feedback and input into the QAI process.

The judgements for the QAI and the completion of the form remain the responsibility of the program manager. However given the analysis process is intended to be a shared and participative process where everyone weighs and considers the available evidence about progress, it is sensible to also use this opportunity to obtain insight for the QAI.

There will also be considerable other information about the program or activity which is important for program development and improvement but less relevant for the AusAID accountability requirements. It is important that consideration of the QAI does not lessen program attention to this other information.

Some Dos and Don'ts for Reporting

Do:

- *Engage with the implementers and the other stakeholders so that you understand the M&E process in full.*
- *Be part of the sense making processes so that you can confidently make judgements about the progress of the program and use this information for QAI completion*
- *Require the program to report to all stakeholders in whatever forms are most useful to them*
- *Be open to new ways of doing things.*

Don't:

- *Ask for simple statements of outcomes which gloss over diversity and important differences.*
- *Be driven by predetermined reporting formats or expectations.*
- *Ignore alternative ways of reporting e.g through photo-stories, video and other narrative techniques,*

Evaluation and redesign

14. Evaluation processes need to follow the same principles and approaches as monitoring.

At some points civil society programs will require evaluation and possibly redesign.

This does not mean changing and checking every part of the program every year, because civil society programs need time to grow and for their strategies to take effect. But sometimes it is useful to stand back and ask evaluative questions:

- What has been the value of the work so far?
- Who has it served?
- How could we do better?

The purpose of the evaluation needs to be clear to all involved²¹. While there are different reasons for evaluation, clarity about the specific purpose enables people to continue to have some control over their participation and engagement. Where evaluation only serves external purposes it can be expected that local stakeholders will be unlikely to engage in any significant ways.

The methodology of the evaluation should build on the monitoring approach used throughout the program, enabling participation, effective gender analysis and the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. It needs to have space for the same sense making processes or analysis processes outlined in the previous sections. While these may include additional external views and insights, it is important that those external participants continue to engage and empower the communities and CSOs who are the focus of the program. Traditional review teams who enter communities for short periods with no previous relationships or legitimacy are unlikely to offer much useful contribution to evaluation of civil society and may do considerable harm to existing processes and relationships.

The evaluation should also consider how adequate the M&E system has been for the program and how well it has served the civil society intentions of the program.

The midterm review of the PACAP program in the Philippines was useful process because it focused on understanding the emergent outcomes in the program. It showed what could be possible for the future. This has led to new emphasis within the program.

15. AusAID requirements: annual consideration of effectiveness

Every year AusAID is required to consider the effectiveness of the whole of its program, this process, the Annual Program Performance Review (APPR) requires that country and sectors review overall effectiveness and progress, including an analysis of the reasons for that progress.

This may be a good opportunity to also ask evaluative questions about the ongoing civil society programs. Question that could be considered include:

²¹ [Baser, H. & P. Morgan. 2008. Capacity, Change and Performance - Study Report \(Discussion Paper, 59B\). Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management](#)

- Is the original rationale for engaging with civil society still relevant? Do we need to update this?
- What has been the value of the engagement with civil society, beyond the specific activity outcomes?
- Could AusAID have achieved this value in other more effective and/ or efficient ways?
- What are the lessons that have been learned which can be feed back to both program development and wider policy development?
- What should be changed about the engagement with civil society in this situation?

This process not necessarily part of a formal evaluation. It is an opportunity provided through the ongoing performance review and quality assurance that AusAID now promotes throughout the whole aid program.

Some Dos and Don'ts for Evaluation

Do:

- *Where possible, seek creative ways of evaluating the program which reinforce empowerment processes and stakeholder involvement.*
- *Ensure the evaluative process assesses gender and gender relations*
- *Encourage the evaluation process to look 'out of the box' for the unexpected & unintended*
- *Ensure the evaluation feeds into on-going program learning*

Don't:

- *Involve external consultants who have little knowledge & legitimacy*
- *Expect simple answers and pithy results in complex situations*
- *Gloss over diversity and the important difference.*

Annex 1: Monitoring and Evaluating AusAID Community Development Programs Initial Discussion Paper

**Ros David, Linda Kelly, Chris Roche,
July 2008**

Preamble

This discussion paper attempts to synthesise Australian and international lessons on monitoring and evaluation of community development and civil society engagement programs. The paper forms the first part of a consultation process with key stakeholders within and external to AusAID for the purpose of developing new guidance for AusAID officers about good quality practice in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of community development and civil society programs.

The paper builds on issues raised at the AusAID Civil Society Network Conference (Canberra, May 2008) and ideas discussed at a Steering Committee meeting for this project held in Canberra (17th June 2008). At that meeting it was agreed that this initial discussion paper would synthesise issues arising from the M&E literature and propose a practice-led consultation process with AusAID staff and other stakeholders. The consultation process would, in turn, lead to the development of practical guidelines on the monitoring and evaluation of community development programs. At this meeting the Steering group confirmed that gender equity should be addressed through ensuring the M&E of gender equality *within* community development initiatives.

The paper is designed to reflect some of the key challenges and learning about civil society and community development M&E from an international perspective. The paper also reflects some of the current views about AusAID experience in M&E, particularly as it relates to civil society and gender programs. The consultation process is expected to add considerably to the latter area, leading to a more informed understanding of the strengths and challenges of current AusAID M&E systems as they apply to these practice areas.

The paper is divided into five sections.

- Section 1 introduces the discussion from the perspective of current AusAID experience.
- Section 2 provides an overview of the literature synthesising key lessons for international development M&E, with particular reference to community development and civil society programs.
- Section 3 attempts to identify some pertinent issues related to the AusAID experience
- Section 4 outlines some useful approaches and tools; and
- Section 5 outlines the intended next steps.

The AusAID Experience

AusAID supports a range of community development and civil society programs. This includes large community development programs focused on funding of local organizations such as the ACCESS program in Indonesia and the PACAP program in the Philippines, as well as a range of smaller programs such as the Chiefs program in Vanuatu or the Churches Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea. AusAID also support Australian NGOs to undertake work that often includes both community development and civil society strengthening. In addition AusAID manage a range of programs that include elements of community development or civil society strengthening as one aspect of a wider program. Finally AusAID provides support for programs which work directly to improve gender outcomes, such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, as well as seeking to mainstream gender and development across the entire aid program. The general picture is one of a range of innovative designs, using various implementations methods, which are seeking to operate effectively in highly varying locations and contexts.

AusAID policy strongly supports the inclusion of such programs within the aid portfolio (AusAID 2007, 2008), however a quick assessment of a sample of such programs suggest that there have been some difficulties in assessment of their contribution to the wider AusAID country and regional strategies.

In part this seems to be about the M&E systems which are applied to the programs. Reports suggest that conventional, M&E, based on simple indicator based assessment of predetermined outcomes is often inadequate to capture the wider and more complex results of such programs (a problem identified for example, in recent assessments of the Chiefs program in Vanuatu and the Solomon Island Civic Education program). Further that conventional M&E often fails to convey all the information required to understand a program (for example, the recent Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Churches Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea found that most external stakeholders supported the program but wanted considerably more information about what it did and how it operated).

Further AusAID experience suggests that changes brought about by community development programs can only be understood with reference to their context (see for example the Independent Completion Report (ICR) for the Indonesian ACCESS program) or that changes and outcomes might be interpreted and reported differently by different stakeholders (for example the MTR of the Vanuatu Women's centre identified several different stakeholder groups with varying perspectives on the achievements of the Centre). Finally, experience suggests that in community development programs different projects under one program can have varying aims and objectives and quite different outcomes (see for example the MTR of the Africa APAC program which struggled to draw together the highly different experiences of six NGOs working across several countries in the broad area of HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation). Assessment of overall outcomes therefore is difficult to understand outside of the specific context and difficult to aggregate in any meaningful way.

A further problem for many AusAID supported community development programs appears to be that 'success' takes a long time and that the information made available by conventional M&E therefore tends to focus on activities and outputs (see for example the ICRs of both the Community Development Scheme (CDS) in Papua New Guinea and the PACAP program in the Philippines. Both reports identified a lack of information about outcomes as a major failure of the project M&E systems). AusAID and other stakeholders are left without information about achievements and about the sustainable benefits of such programs.

Beyond the M&E systems there also appears to be some limitations in articulating the program rationale for some community development and NGO programs. For example, the ICR for the CDS scheme in Papua New Guinea concluded

“CDS2 design lacked some clarity of purpose as to what real change or end-of-program impact it was supposed to bring about, and how necessary or sufficient that change would be in terms of contributing, meaningfully, to national poverty reduction objectives. It also lacked meaningful measures of that change or impact.” (CDS ICR, 2008)

This aspect of the problem appears in part to be related to the innovative nature of many of the AusAID supported community development programs. Design processes have widened beyond simple, problem based program logic (for example the CPP program in Papua New Guinea and the support provided for the youth focused organisation, ‘One Smol Bag’ in Vanuatu) and have begun to utilise new theories of how change will come about. However the M&E systems do not appear to have kept pace with these design changes. There is less clarity about why programs are supported and insufficient information about how the way in which their outcomes contribute to the wider AusAID strategies within a country or region.

Other experience of M&E in international development

AusAID is not alone in struggling to improve its monitoring and evaluation²². A review of the Australian and international M&E literature suggests that other bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors have had similar experiences. Drawing from that literature there appears to be five recurrent lessons which have relevance for the AusAID experience.

- There is growing recognition of the non-linear and complex nature of development and therefore a need to develop M&E system which can capture this more sophisticated understanding of change processes;
- Single actors can only have a partial knowledge of complex problems and therefore M&E approaches have to be able to accommodate different perspectives in a meaningful way;
- Aid agencies need to be aware of, and address, power and gender relations in their work, including how they assess outcomes;
- Strategies and outcomes needs to be updated in the light of changing circumstances; and
- Organisational enablers are critical to promoting effective monitoring and evaluation.

Each of these areas is examined in detail below.

Growing recognition of the non-linear and complex nature of development

The literature presents a growing recognition amongst some donors, and academics, of the non-linear and more complex interpretations of developmental change. There is a linked, and emerging, understanding of how pre-conceptions of change influence how development agencies value, assess and interpret information. In addition, there is a growing recognition of the importance of clarifying the implicit theories, models and drivers of change that guide agencies approaches to development,

The limitations of a simple linear cause-effect approach to promoting change, based on certainty, rationality and predictability, is being increasingly challenged in the aid arena. At the heart of this is the recognition that the development process is made up of a complex

²² A World Bank evaluation of Poverty Reduction Strategy processes indicated that the M&E of its PRSP processes has been one of the hardest issues to get right. Out of 39 questions the one on M&E received the most negative response. In response to the question ‘An effective structure to monitor and evaluate results has been established’, 41 per cent of the respondents ‘disagreed’, or ‘disagreed completely’, whereas a further 21 per cent answered ‘don’t know or unsure’ (World Bank 2004)

web of inter-relationships which cannot be 'managed' like a project, which are sensitive to context, and when subject to interventions act in unpredictable ways (Uphoff 1992, Eyben 2007, Krznaric 2007, Guijt 2008). This thinking has been paralleled by thinking in official aid circles. Within DFID the 'Drivers of Change' studies have identified these issues, as did the AusAID study in Vanuatu (Cox et al 2007). According to DFID this tendency emerges from the recognition

"..That effective programmes must be grounded in an understanding of the economic, social and political factors that either drive or block change within a country [and].... as a way of applying political economy analysis to the development of donor strategy"²³.

This development has been accompanied by attempts to look at the implications of non-linear change for M&E (Reeler 2007, Eoyang et al 1998).

Doug Reeler, for example, suggests that linear forms of 'projectable' change are the exception rather than rule. As a result, the application of orthodox M&E (based on the use of logical frameworks and time-bound indicators) is inappropriate and he proposes other approaches based on 'emergent' and 'transformative' change (Reeler 2007).

Emergent change represents

"..the day-to-day unfolding of life, [the] adaptive and uneven processes of unconscious and conscious learning from experience, and the change that results from that".

In other words the kind of ongoing change we experience every day. He notes that in these circumstances it is important to encourage staff and partners to develop as 'reflective-practitioners' (Schon 1983) and develop more action-learning approaches to M&E.

Transformative change describes more abrupt or radical change often associated with a crisis, or when latent pressure for change is suddenly released. In these circumstances Reeler proposes a more questioning approach to M&E. One that explores and surfaces contradictions and paradoxes, which encourages 'unlearning' and 'double-loop learning' (see Pasteur 2006) and which challenges fundamental assumptions of the usual ways of doing things.

Examples of Projectable, Emergent and Transformative Change

Projectable Change might include, for example, the running of an immunization program. In these circumstances what needs to be done is clear and generally agreed, quality standards exist, and the effects of the intervention (i.e reduction in disease), are known in advance.

Emergent Change might include attempting to build more effective relationships between civil society and government. In these circumstances the exact end point of this journey cannot be accurately predicted. Rather the relationships required will need to develop out of the ongoing and regular process of trust building and the development of mutual understanding, which needs regular adjustment. In the cases "the path is made by walking it".

Transformative Change might include trying to broker a peace-deal during a conflict. In these circumstances there is no manual or agreement that can guide precisely how to do this, existing ways of looking at the problem may be part of the reason that the problem exists in the first place, and that therefore reframing the problem, and challenging existing assumptions about its causes may be critical. In these cases the vision may be clear but the means of achieving it much less obvious.

²³ See <http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/drivers-of-change>

Single actors can only have a partial knowledge of complex problems

A second lesson emerging from the recent development literature is that any single actor can only have partial knowledge of complex or 'unbounded' problems. There is a need for a broad range of perspectives to understand what is really going on in complex environments. Indeed, the Paris Declaration is an explicit recognition that the development process needs to be undertaken in partnership, that different actors have different roles in that partnership, and that effective relationships between these partners is critical.

The importance of recognising 'partial knowledge' is paralleled by the need to value and recognise different perspectives. Eyben (2006) writes that whilst

"...it may be impossible to have a total grasp of the complexity of our global society, each of us has at least some understanding. These varieties of understanding can in dialogue shape responsible policy, one negotiated by respecting difference, where those involved appreciate that there are many ways of understanding the world and its problems"..

Acknowledging partial knowledge, respecting difference and negotiating policy is particularly important when problems are "unbounded" or "divergent". For example, where:

- There is no clear agreement about the exact nature of the problem because of its complexity and multi-causal nature
- There is uncertainty and ambiguity as to how the problem might be addressed.
- The problem has no limits in terms of the time and resources it could absorb.

Many of the problems that confront aid agencies in general and governments, in particular are of this nature. It is unsurprising therefore that 'messy partnerships' or complex partnership arrangements are needed to deal with such problems and that it is unclear what success will look like and how this might be achieved (Guijt 2008).

As a review of a number of recent donor studies notes

"[p]ower and Drivers of Change analysis is potentially challenging, because it questions fundamental assumptions about how development happens. It reinforces the need for harmonisation of donor approaches to be based on rigorous and honest debate about different perspectives." (Dahl-Østergaard et al 2005).

Other authors also stress the need to map out the theory, or theories of change that underpin a democratic dialogue. This approach ...

"..is based on the importance of knowing what implicit or explicit understanding of social change underpins the process that one is assessing and wanting to learn from".(Guijt 2008 citing Pruitt and Thomas, 2007).

The implications of unbounded, complex problems and partial knowledge for M&E are interesting. In these cases, agreeing objectives and indicators may be problematic and outlining clear program logic at the outset may not be feasible as it may require prolonged negotiation with other partners and an unfolding of issues to emerge. Rather than a predetermined orthodox approach to M&E, Guijt suggests that the monitoring and evaluation approaches should 'seek surprise' (2008).

Aid agencies need to be aware of, and address, power and gender relations

The debates on the necessity of explicitly understanding the theory of change and bringing together different perspectives, are accompanied by a growing literature on the nature and

role of power relations in development. Understanding power relations at all levels is seen to be important, that is, within communities in terms of gender, class and ethnicity (Guijt & Shah 1998, Gaventa 2006); between donors and recipient governments (Helleiner 2000, Hyden 2008), and NGOs and 'partners' (Wallace et al 2007); and within development agencies themselves (Eyben 2006). This has two major implications for monitoring and evaluation. Firstly that any assessment of community development or civil society engagement needs to critically review the degree to which power relations and relative participation are addressed and effected throughout the project cycle. Secondly that agencies need to be acutely aware of their own power both in terms of how this shapes their relationships with partners and communities as well as how power is distributed within their own organisation (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002).

Work on gender relations has perhaps gone furthest in looking at the relationship between these different levels, notably in how organisations can reproduce the inequalities inherent in the societies in which they are embedded, unless these issues are explicitly tackled (Goetz 1998).

Much of the effort in many agencies has focused on developing gender sensitive indicators, and gender disaggregated data and measures with the assumption that it will assist organizations to: a) take gender equality seriously, b) enable better planning and actions, c) hold institutions accountable to their commitments on gender equality, d) allow for cross-national comparisons of gender equality and enable complex data to be condensed into simple statements about achievements and gaps (BRIDGE, 2007).

However it has also been recognized that some issues are difficult to conceptualize and measure using orthodox M&E approaches. This includes, for example, issues such as women's empowerment or the gender dimensions of poverty. Furthermore, there are sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence, and sexuality, and sensitive contexts, such as the gender dimensions of armed conflict which produce particular methodological challenges (BRIDGE, 2007).

A number of studies also indicate the risks of pre-defining indicators. Nalia Kabeer for example noted in Bangladesh that some micro finance studies used women's control over micro-finance as a key indicator of their empowerment. However this was at odds with women's own definition of empowerment and well-being which was about the importance of joint decision making with their husbands. This indicates how some, purportedly gender aware M&E approaches can exclude women's or communities' lived experiences and assessments of change (Kabeer, 1998),

The current literature therefore suggests that if development agencies are to overcome their partial knowledge, work in partnership and negotiate different models and theories of change this means being aware of their own power and recognising how this can privilege some voices and perspectives and diminish others. The implications are that monitoring and evaluation processes need to involve a careful analysis of both what is assessed, but equally importantly how that assessment is undertaken and whose voices are privileged in the process.

Strategies and outcomes need to be updated in the light of changing circumstances

A fourth lesson arising from the literature is the importance of adjusting and refining theories of change, strategies and outcomes in the light of changing circumstances and dynamic feedback. As David Booth has noted in his review of M&E best practice in PRSP processes 'rapid feedback on this [i.e. intermediary] level of change is what matters most for accountability and learning' (Booth 2002).

A number of authors have suggested that an over-emphasis on indicators as the key means of defining and testing progress has diminished organizations' openness to feedback and 'surprises' (Roche 1999, Estrella 2000, Davies 2005, Guijt 2008).

“ the notion of approaching all monitoring through one type of data process (i.e. indicator-based) ...was acknowledged as a crude and inappropriate way to view information needs..” (Guijt 2008).

The reality is that information about how a project or process is going comes to staff in a variety of formal and informal forms and through a variety of processes including observation, discussion and formal reports etc. Over-emphasising indicators can lead to an organisation ignoring important information, particularly that related to unexpected and unanticipated effects.

These findings are consistent with approaches that rely less on the blueprint planning model and more on learning from reality. Indeed some argue that

“..a well-functioning national M&E system that devotes considerable attention to the twin functions of feedback (lesson learning) and accountability is thus a linchpin of the new aid paradigm..” (Holvoet, and Renard 2007).

The review of World Bank community development and community driven projects supports this view, noting that, given the importance of local social and cultural contextual issues in community development processes, learning by doing is much more useful than application of designs based on predetermined models of change. This learning by doing has to be based on constant feedback in order to continually adjust the programs to local circumstances and learning as they proceed (Mansuri et al 2003).

Organizational enablers are critical in promoting effective M&E and gender mainstreaming

A fifth lesson from the literature is that both M&E and gender mainstreaming need to be consistently supported through organisational systems. Numerous studies point to the importance of a number of organisational enablers that are critical in promoting effective M&E and gender mainstreaming. Many of them are remarkably similar, they include:

- The importance of leadership from senior managers and boards. This is leadership which sends strong messages about the importance of learning, accountability and the critical importance of addressing gender equity as a key means of addressing MDGs (UNDP 2007). But also leadership which models learning, openness and honesty, invites feedback, and which engages in dialogue with others in ways that recognise power differentials and partial knowledge (Eyben 2006, David and Mancini 2004).
- The importance of learning being valued within an organisation so that space, time and resources are dedicated to discussing feedback, sense-making, reflecting & learning from experiences, preferably with other stakeholders. As well as shifts in organizational practices to take risks and manage for outcomes rather than outputs; and improved capacity to assess results and performance (UNDP 2007) This in turn means getting the balance right between 'proving' success and 'improving' practice through an honest admission of errors and mistakes (Estrella 2000, Guijt 2008).
- The importance of the alignment of incentives in ways that reinforce rather than contradict each other. This means reviewing both explicit and implicit organisational incentives:

- Explicit incentives include the linkage between annual appraisals, results and competency assessments, linked to objectives and indicators,
- Implicit incentives include deeper cultural issues (i.e. whether mobilization of resources is seen to be more important than results). As AusAID own thematic performance report on gender notes “[C]ultural issues are also central to consideration of ownership of gender equality. Gender relations are at the very heart of any culture, and culture shapes personal and institutional behaviour (AusAID 2008).

Understanding the dominant culture is therefore important. External pressures, the relative power of different stakeholders and interests contribute to setting the ‘rules of the game’ for internal processes. Organisations can then also reproduce the inequities they embody. For example UNDP’s recent review of its M&E systems noted that corporatist approaches to M&E can have limited or perverse effects on development effectiveness with more junior levels manipulating their programmes to fit corporate straight jackets and in doing so divert attention from local needs and make reporting more about process than substance. The review also found that there was mixed evidence about whether the corporate M&E approaches significantly affect the shape of country-level programmes and partnerships, but there was significant evidence that they could impose unnecessary transaction costs (UNDP 2007).

Additional considerations from the AusAID perspective

The review of current AusAID experience suggests that many traditional M&E approaches do not serve the information and learning needs of the agency, particularly within the complex and messy interventions such as community development and civil society programs. AusAID, alongside many other donors, are missing the rich picture of what is happening in community development programs and are struggling to assess gender relations within them. This is often compounded by a lack of clarity of the underlying theory, or theories, of change which provide an overall rationale for individual projects and programs.

It seems that within AusAID there a number of different suggestions²⁴ as to why this problem may exist, which include:

- being unclear what success (or failure) in community development or gender work looks like, and over what time-scale,
- being unable to define clear and appropriate levels of objectives, and a tendency to focus reporting and indicators on activities and processes not outcomes and results,
- being unclear why AusAID wishes to engage with civil society, or undertake community development, and how this fits into broader programs and strategies,
- being unclear how to distil and communicate diverse and complex information,
- being unclear how to engage to address weaknesses in partners’ M&E systems
- the assessment of changes in gender relations tending to get reduced to demands for gender disaggregated data,

²⁴ Some of these issues were raised at the Civil Society Network Conference in May 2008. Some have appeared in the drafts of the terms of reference for this work. Some were raised during the meeting with Steering Committee in June 2008 and in meetings with individuals in Canberra before and after that meeting.

- a view that organisational systems and planning processes are not flexible enough to capture the fluidity and complexity of community development processes and changes in gender relations – and indeed may hinder necessary learning and adaptation,
- overcomplicating things instead of keeping it very simple,
- Not having the space, time or resources for learning and quality management.

As the literature suggests there are a number of understandable reasons why AusAid and other donors struggle with these issues. Some of these are methodological and relate to the challenges of addressing attribution, aggregation, selecting appropriate indicators etc. Others are related to organisational systems, culture and resourcing. But many also relate to the complex nature of the community development and the realities of working in partnership with others.

Arguably many of the issues also relate to different definitions of accountability. For some development is centrally concerned with accountability i.e. development is about transforming power relations so people in poverty can hold the powerful to account and achieve social justice. For others accountability is part of a culture of upward reporting, risk management and ‘mad-audit disease’ which not only stifles creativity and innovation, but ultimately diminishes trust. This can leave staff in the not-for-profit and public sectors becoming less accountable to the citizens they serve (Roche 2006). For those that see accountability as central to the development process the way forward requires a holistic version of accountability which would include: transparency; participation; learning and evaluation; and grievance and redress²⁵.

But the literature also suggests that part of the solution is to recognise that we need an intelligent mix of M&E processes and systems which are compatible with the reality of the challenges aid agencies face. Practical, and possibly innovative, ways to capture experience and learning from these programs are needed. Indeed, processes which also enable an organisation such as AusAID to make use of that information for a range of purposes which include learning, improving practice, accountability, and policy development.

²⁵ See One World Trust http://www.oneworldtrust.org/?display=index_2006 or Bonbright D. (2007) The Changing Face of Accountability: A talk at the International Seminar on Civil Society and Accountability, Montevideo, 16 April 2007

Possible useful approaches and tools

So what might this intelligent mix include? What other areas of M&E might be useful to explore and learn from? Again the international literature suggests a range of possibilities which may inform further development of AusAID approaches and systems.

Social Accountability Initiatives

Recent years have seen a growing interest in social accountability initiatives as a means for people living in poverty and the organizations that support them to hold governments and other actors to account²⁶. The importance of these mechanisms is that they form part of development processes which strengthens and empowers the voice of poor communities vis-a-vis other actors. In so doing they are also providing important information and feedback on what is working and what is not.

There is clearly potential for mechanism such as these to play a role in providing feedback to community development programs, (Macnamara, IDS bulletin Jan 2008, Goetz & Jenkins). These might be complemented by more macro studies and indicators based on a number of attempts to develop means to measure good governance, democracy, corruption and freedom and the strength of civil society (Civicus, 2008).

The Uganda Debt Network

The Uganda Debt Network was established 1996, and had been instrumental in campaigning for debt relief as well as developing a civil society response to holding the government to account for spending that debt relief in an accountable manner. This was assisted by ensuring that debt relief was allocated to a ring-fenced Poverty Action Fund established in 1997/8. UDN established Poverty Monitoring Committees in the first instance in 12 out of 45 districts in Uganda, and then in 17. This then developed into Community based Monitoring and Evaluation systems which involved communities carrying out monitoring using their own developed tools which they used to collect qualitative data, analysis of information.

These qualitative assessments were complemented by scoring against criteria developed in a performance scorecard which provided feedback from the local to national level and which complemented traditional reporting processes which can often lead to overly aggregated data which loses a level of detail and richness, and which can mean that important extremes of performance are not captured in a timely way
Summarized from Roche (2005)

Advocacy & Policy work

Clearly there is also much to learn from the monitoring and evaluation of advocacy work. Advocacy and policy work is generally recognised as non-linear, complex and has particular challenges regarding attribution. It therefore offers interesting lessons to community development work. Advocacy initiatives often attempt to monitor key dimensions of change which are also germane to community development and civil society work, notably: changes in norms, ideas & beliefs; changes in policies and practices; changes in the capacity of people [living in poverty] and organisations to advocate for change; and the degree to which democratic or political space is increasing or decreasing (Miller 1997, Chapman and Wameyo 2001, Brown and Fox 1999, Roche 1999).

²⁶ For example the AusAID commissioned review by Macnamara (2006) provides a very useful overview of examples of such initiatives particularly as they relate to health and education services. They include processes of budget formulation, analysis and monitoring – including gender budget analysis, community based monitoring, citizen report cards, and grievance and redress mechanisms.

RAPID Case Study of SPHERE

One of the most significant policy shifts in the international humanitarian sector in the last decade has been the move to strengthen the accountability of humanitarian agencies. The decision to launch the Sphere project in 1996 was one of the key policy initiatives associated with this shift.

One of RAPID's case studies explored the process that led up to this policy initiative, and how buy-in and ownership were achieved. By examining the interaction between the context, the quality of the action-research that was undertaken to produce the SPHERE charter and standards and the links between researchers, policy and decision-makers the study illuminates a complex and non-linear process by using a theory based methodology. *Summarized from Buchanan-Smith (2003)*

One particular example is ODI's RAPID research,²⁷ which has developed a useful methodology to assess evaluations of research and policy interventions. This approach helps to answer questions like: What impact do donor policy documents have on practice? How can policy guidance be made more effective? How to improve the policy environment in order to promote effective practice?

The ODI framework looks at the interaction between the context; the quality and methodology of the policy work and advocacy; and the institutional linkages, networks and alliances offers useful insights for the assessment of civil society influencing and for the degree to which donor/government policy provides

an enabling environment for civil society.

Gender

There are a number and range of innovations piloted by women's organizations and others which offer different ways of assessing change in gender relations. These are often related to women's leadership, men and masculinity and campaigns on violence against women. Brambilla (2001) looks at some of the practical experiences of designing gender sensitive M&E systems many of which are from NGOs community development initiatives. Some of these include participatory M&E processes as well as adaptations of ethnographic research (see text box below).

Gender, Key Informant Monitoring and the Nepal Safer Motherhood Project (NSMP)

The NSMP works to improve maternal health. The project has used Key Informant Monitoring (KIM). KIM as an adaption of the participant-observation processes of ethnographic research. Data is collected by community-based researchers and used for monitoring and planning. KIM takes as its starting point the idea that the context is important in shaping health-seeking behavior and maternal outcomes. The approach recognizes the importance of building trust and rapport between the researcher and the researched, as well as acknowledging ethnicity, gender, kinship and age and associated power relations. As a result KIM has sought to:

- Train women to interview others of similar age and social background.
- Make use of conversational prompts to collect data on barriers to services, quality of care and women's decision making.
- establish debriefing workshops for researchers with NSMP female local facilitators to cross-check results
- Develop interaction with women and their families, to also become catalysts for dialogue and change, for example, by convincing family members to take women with obstetric complications to hospital.

One of the methodological challenges have included researchers becoming over-committed to program objectives and overzealous in the pursuit of evidence of better access and service quality.

Summarized from Price, N., and Pokharel, D., 2005

²⁷ See <http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/>

Caren-Levy's development of the 'Web of Institutionalisation' approach to gender (adopted by UNEP, ILO, IUCN) provides a tool for looking at different dimensions within organisations such as the: policy sphere, the citizen sphere, the organisational sphere, and delivery sphere. This may be applicable to the kinds of gender assessments that organisations promoting gender equality may need to conduct as well as a framework for assessing the progress of larger partner organisations in mainstreaming gender (Caren-Levy 1996).

Finally a number of NGOs such as Oxfam have developed a range of tools and processes such as: program gender audits; criteria for the assessment of the degree to which regional/country strategies have mainstreamed gender; methods for evaluating changes in belief systems in relation to gender related campaigns²⁸; and published material on different frameworks to guide gender work/evaluations (March et al 1996)²⁹.

²⁸ Such as 'We Can' in South Asia which is a campaign designed to reduce violence against women.

<http://www.wecanendvaw.org/>

²⁹ As NGOs may have something to offer in this area – but may well not make this material available easily – AusAID might consider arranging to meet with NGO staff working on these issues to share tools, methods and experiences.

The Humanitarian Experience

There are also pertinent approaches which have been developed in the humanitarian sphere. Agencies working on humanitarian issues recognise the particular circumstances of M&E of humanitarian work, notably how security, trauma and conflict pose particular challenges; how rapid and unpredictable change need to be factored in to M&E; and how to balance tracking short term effects (increasingly through real time evaluations³⁰) and long term consequences. A number of important initiatives have been developed associated with particular dilemmas that have been faced for example in Biafra, Somalia, the Great Lakes, Bosnia etc. This has resulted in efforts to define agreed and collective standards and principles (the Red Cross Code³¹, SPHERE³²); debates on moral dilemmas and how to deal with them (e.g. Hugo Slim 1997); efforts to enhance collective learning and evaluation (ALNAP³³) and developing initiatives on joint accountability (HAP-I³⁴).

The ALNAP-TEC evaluation of the Indian Ocean Tsunami response questions the degree to which these quality initiatives are having a sufficient impact. In particular the review suggests that the biggest potential driver for quality should be feedback to the donor public on the quality of an agency's operations. Feedback that should be driven more by information from the people affected by the disaster than by the agencies' communication departments.

Notwithstanding the challenges that the Tsunami produced, it is arguably the case that the humanitarian agencies has much to offer in terms of M&E. This sector has developed more innovative and creative ways of attempting to develop standards, improve accountability to affected communities and develop 'real time' learning that offer some ways forward on how to deal with some of the issues raised earlier in this paper.

Gender Watch

Following the Tsunami in Sri Lanka an initiative called Gender Watch was established by a local Women's organization supported by International NGO and involving a wider group of government and multilaterals. The initiative enabled women to report domestic violence, sexual harassment and discrimination to the group. The group documented violations in the camps and distributed the information to international agencies and the government. Remedial action taken includes: having a government officer suspended for violations; providing protection to five orphaned children; ensuring women have access to oral contraceptives; facilitating access to the police in the case of domestic violence; temporary shelters being given to single women who were originally excluded because they did not possess the right papers, and registering women for the provision of ration cards so that they can have access to relief goods.

Summarized from Roche, 2005

³⁰ <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2772>

³¹ <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>

³² See www.sphereproject.org

³³ See www.alnap.org

³⁴ www.hapinternational.org

Organisational Change and Development

Many community development and community driven processes have capacity building as a central element. A key M&E question therefore relates to the degree to which organisational capacity has, or has not, been enhanced, whether this includes an organisational capacity to address gender equality concerns; and the degree to which networks and alliances – rather than individual agencies – have developed.

A recent European Centre for Development Policy Management report (ECPDM 2005) suggest that ‘soft systems methods’ are particularly useful in dealing with ‘messy complex situations characterised by unclear goals, contested strategies and uncertain outcomes’. Indeed the framework³⁵ developed by ECPDM and studies undertaken in Papua New Guinea using this framework³⁶ seem to offer some useful pointers in this area.

ECPDM review of capacity, change and performance issues in PNG’s Health Sector

This study was one of 20 case studies focused on the process of change from the perspective of those undergoing that change, and examined the factors that encourage it, how it differs from one context to another, and why efforts to develop capacity have been more successful in some contexts than in others.

The use of this method in PNG helps illuminate how the health system in PNG is a complex of competing and complementary policies, institutional arrangements, relationships, incentives, and political interests, some of which support efforts to strengthen sector capacity and improve performance, and others which can undermine it. The study also helps indicate the importance of Papua New Guinean culture, traditions and diversity as factors influencing organizational behavior, stakeholder collaboration, and even the perceived legitimacy of the state.
Summarized from Bolger et al (2005)

Next steps

The intention of this discussion paper has been to provide a basis for further consultation with key stakeholders about the AusAID M&E systems, as they relate to community development and civil society programs supported by the agency. The final outcome is intended to be a set of practical guidelines which include

- a. Guidelines or ideas about how programs could go about constructing theories or models of change that match the complex and varying contexts of many community development and civil society programs and how these might be communicated effectively to wider audiences.
- b. Guidelines or ideas about how to develop an intelligent mix of M&E approaches that are coherent and consistent with these theories of change.
- c. Guidelines and ideas for addressing gender and related power relations, within community development monitoring and evaluating process.

³⁵ Watson, D. Monitoring and evaluation of capacity and capacity development. (Discussion Paper 58B). Maastricht: ECDPM. <http://www.ecdpm.org/dp58B>

³⁶ See Bolger et al (2005) and Hauck et al (2005)

- d. Suggestions for what kind of organisational culture, values & leadership are required for effective M&E processes within this area of community development and civil society.

It is recognised that the consultation process could cover a wide range of programs, (including the many AusAID supported programs which include elements of community development and civil society development alongside other multiple objectives and intentions and the wide range of programs implemented by Australian NGOs). In order to maintain a feasible focus for this process, the proposal is to take a 'bounded learning approach'. That is to focus on a limited number of programs, specifically those programs funded directly by AusAID for community based organisations in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Philippines, while also drawing on experience from a range of other programs as appropriate. These are likely to include the extensive range of community based programs in Vanuatu, other civil society programs in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and East Timor and possibly a small number of examples from some Australian NGO work. Where possible attention will also be given to examples of gender related and gender focused programs as well as the inclusion of gender focused M&E in community development programs.

The resultant findings and guidance may well have wider application to other AusAID programs and their M&E systems, particularly in the assessment of gender outcomes. As appropriate this information will also be captured and disseminated. However the intention is to retain a bounded focus in order to see what could 'work' in practice within these more limited set of experiences.

The consultation process is intended to reflect the practice reality of the issues discussed in this paper. The proposal is to work from 'practice up' involving a limited number of Posts to explore existing M&E practice, the challenges they have with providing information and analysis for AusAID systems, and how the practices might be better improved and supported.

The proposed consultation approach will be developed as the next step for this process.

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Annex 2: Framework for the Analysis of the Quality of Gender Integration in Programs

Level A: Blind	Level B: Basic	Level C: Moderate	Level D: Strong
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gender disaggregated data • No evidence of consultation with relevant individuals and organisations. • Little or no gender analysis • Limited if any review of past practice. • Repeated use of gender neutral terms • No specific strategies to enhance women's status or address gender inequality. • No OD strategy for strengthening gender mainstreaming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited gender disaggregated data. • Gender analysis is restricted to women's roles in isolation from men and/or focuses on only one or two dimensions of gender inequality. • Does not examine connections between gender and other forms of social exclusion e.g. those due to caste, class, ethnicity, indigeneity, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. • Gender analysis tends to be generic rather than context specific. • Strategies have limited focus on gender inequality or the enhancement of women's status i.e. interventions at only one level and in particular do not adequately address changes at meso and macro levels. • Weak OD strategy if any. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has used a gender-sensitive planning process. • Addresses women's empowerment but stops short of analysing the balance of power between men and women and men's role in addressing gender inequality. • Addresses, where appropriate, the multiple dimensions of gender inequality at multiple levels. • Includes gender-specific changes in policies and practice that address the issues identified in the analysis at least at micro and meso levels. • Includes strategies that are gender sensitive and support equal participation by men and women. • Includes an OD strategy for strengthening gender mainstreaming in AusAID and in partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has used an effective gender sensitive planning process • Includes gender disaggregated data. • Includes a gender analysis which makes clear the links – in context specific terms - between gender inequality, poverty and human rights. • Analyses and responds to the interconnections, in context specific terms, between gender and other forms of identity/exclusion e.g. caste, disability and in particular ethnicity and HIV/AIDS. • Includes gender-specific changes in policies/practices at micro, meso, macro levels that draws on the gender analysis. • Analyses and links changes to external targets as set out CEDAW, BPFA and other human rights instruments, as appropriate. • Identifies approaches to policy and practice change at micro, meso, macro levels that empower men and women to change gender relations. • Identifies types of partners and/or proposes partnerships with key organisations at micro, meso and macro levels with a strong commitment to or capacity with promoting women's status or enhancing gender equity. • Includes a gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. • Includes a relevant, cost-effective strategy for enhancing gender mainstreaming in AusAID and in partners/allies that addresses key issues identified in the internal context analysis.