

Monitoring and Evaluation for learning - IICD's unique approach

"Monitoring and Evaluation is not there to spy on you, but to mirror your development trails"

Mr. Casius Chuma, evaluation partner Zambia

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is high on the agenda of many development organisations, including that of IICD. While M&E is generally used as a tool to measure results and provide accountability, IICD introduced M&E for the purpose of learning. This leaflet describes the added value of M&E for learning, how it is organised and what is learned over the years.

All the work that IICD is carrying out in the countries is lead by guiding principles. One of the most important principles is that of local ownership: ultimately, it is the local partner who is responsible for the results of the activities on the ground. The M&E system designed by IICD is based on the same idea and helps local partners to learn from experiences and to take ownership.

M&E as part of an integrated approach

To understand the added value of M&E as a tool for learning it is important to realise that monitoring and evaluation is part of IICD's Country Programmes. A Country Programme supports local partners in the South in their efforts to implement ICT as a tool for development in various sectors. To get Country Programmes of the ground IICD is using a methodology which makes use of roundtable workshops, capacity development, knowledge sharing and networking, plus monitoring and evaluation. Currently, IICD has Country Programmes operating in several countries in Africa, Latin-America and the Caribbean¹ which support development in education, the environment, good governance, health and livelihoods.

IICD believes that ICT for development will be more successful if it meets the needs of the stakeholders in a specific sector who are responsible for the whole process of formulating and implementing project ideas regarding the use of ICT in a specific sector, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of their own activities. IICD assists the partners involved in the Country Programme with monitoring and evaluating the economic and



Focus group meeting, Zambia

organisational impact of their project and measuring how it has empowered end-users and increased their awareness of the benefits of ICT. The system thus helps local partners to reflect on the whole process and understand what obstacles may be encountered when implementing ICT initiatives in the future.

Evaluation is therefore not just for the benefit of donors or IICD, but end-users too. It helps to create a learning environment that widens the impact of ICT for development that will ultimately improve the social and economic position of end-users.

Marketing principles

Following a long process of experimenting and discussing the various options, the method of data collection used commercially for marketing purposes was - with some modifications - found to be valuable. First it was considered what output the local partners needed. As in a commercial business, a good way to reflect on progress is by asking the target group: the *end-users* of projects, such as farmers and teachers.

¹ The M&E system is not used in the Caribbean.



They are the people who notice the impact of improved information and communication as a result of a project. Who better to learn from than the people we are working for?

The second step was to define how to measure *impact* at this level. IICD formulated five indicators: awareness, empowerment, economic impact, negative impact and organisational impact. Each indicator is made up of several elements. For instance, empowerment consists of skills, self-confidence and influence on decision-making. End-users can give feedback by responding to questions or statements in a survey such as: "Through this project I have gained more self-confidence". Together, these indicators can give a good impression of the impact of IICD's programmes in education, health, governance and livelihoods.



Group discussion, Ecuador

The third step was to develop an online tool to make the questionnaires more widely available. The third version of this tool can now be found at <http://demosurvey.iicd.org>.

The 'why' behind the data

Not all the monitoring and evaluation is carried out by IICD itself. Most of the local tasks are handled by an independent local M&E partner. An important task of this partner is offering support to the projects and other local partners including the collection of quantitative data. Questionnaires can be filled out online or using printed copies, depending on the facilities available. After a training session participants can complete the questionnaire using a computer, for example, but in most cases local partners hand out hard copies. The completed questionnaires are collected from project end-users, course and seminar participants, members of the National ICT for Development Networks and project team members themselves.

The work of the local M&E partners can be quite difficult, such as when they have to travel long distances to reach the target group. Where the end users are illiterate they have to read out the questions and help them fill in their responses. In some cases, questionnaires are translated in local languages.

When all the data has been collected it is analysed and the findings compiled in a full report. The M&E partner presents the findings to all the project owners at the annual national focus group meetings, which often leads to lively discussion. Quantitative data is useful, but the 'why' behind the data is what's important. Focus group meetings where we interpret the data together with partner organisations are therefore crucial. It is during these meetings that the actual knowledge sharing and exchange of experience takes place among all the partners in a country. Finding out that you are not alone in struggling with an issue is in itself often a valuable lesson!

As projects mature, M&E will gradually pass to the project partners. M&E is a valuable tool that enables those involved in projects to plan for the future. It also supports project partners in their efforts towards local ownership and creates a positive learning environment for all.

In Mali, the issue of gender imbalance was discussed after seeing the results of an analysis. It showed a clear gender imbalance between project end-users. The discussion led to a self-compiled list of possible ways to address equal participation, like making a special effort to include women in training sessions.

Building trust

One of the things IICD has learned over the years is that the term 'evaluation' is often met with resistance. To overcome the reluctance of partners and end-users to openly discuss difficulties and challenges, IICD separated the learning process from financial control. Neither the online questionnaires nor the focus group meetings contain any financial aspects. This is a very strong feature of IICD's M&E system.

Financial accountability is covered in a separate process using quarterly progress reports.





Local M&E partner in Ecuador, Martha Nuñez (on right), captures focus group discussion.

The quarterly progress reports are dealt with by the country manager, not the M&E officer. This separation facilitates free speech and builds trust among local project partners. IICD learned first-hand that developing trust takes time! What helped was making clear what the evaluation was going to be used for: learning - together!

Another positive aspect of the M&E method is that it is understood from the outset that IICD is to be evaluated too. IICD considers itself part of the learning process and this also helps to build trust. Project partners can fill out questionnaires evaluating the assistance and support provided by IICD. The IICD country manager is an equal participant in focus group meetings and the M&E officer supports and coaches the local M&E partner in facilitating the meeting.

The way forward

In the past years IICD has accumulated a lot of experience with M&E and online tools. It learned a lot from impact measurement at the end-user level, which makes it possible to see which questions work and which don't. In the meantime new questionnaires have been developed and an eLearning tool. The eLearning tool which was developed together with private sector partner Atos Origin Learning Solutions teaches people how to use the online tool without the need of further training. More people will therefore be able to make use of the M&E system.

In the years to come IICD hopes to further expand its learning by M&E. Not only look will be looked into how the impact of the programmes can be measured on the long term, but also how knowledge that is gathered through M&E can be capitalized.

Finally, IICD will look into how local ownership of the whole M&E process can be further strengthened. Eventually, the local project partners need to own, run and use the M&E system to do their own learning.

M&E: an integral part of development

The questionnaires and results from focus group meetings over the past years have been immensely helpful in providing insight and creating a reflective tool for IICD's partners. More than 18,000 questionnaires have so far been collected including almost 4,000 responses from project end-users. The end-user evaluation for each project is repeated annually in order to learn over time from changes in the data how the project cycle could possibly be improved.

To IICD and its partners, M&E has proved to be extremely valuable for learning and self-improvement. That's why IICD believes that its unique approach of M&E is an integral part of development!

In Bolivia M&E has already been adopted entirely by project partners. Further training has enabled them to make complete analyses of data and facilitate focus group meetings. The partners have taken the process of data evaluation completely into their own hands!

More information

For reports and additional information, please visit our website www.iicd.org/evaluation or contact Ms. Hanna Gordon at hgordon@iicd.org or Anne Marijke Podt at ampodt@iicd.org. The online M&E system can be viewed at <http://demosurvey.iicd.org>.



IICD's online tool

Crucial for IICD's M&E system is the online tool they have created at <http://demosurvey.iicd.org>. The tool supports the collection of data and the analyses of results. It enables IICD and its partners to discuss the results and tackle challenges together. Below, you can see what the online tool looks like:

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With the right tools, people in developing countries can considerably improve their livelihoods and quality of life. Better access to information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly vital in enabling them to achieve their goals. This is why the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) creates practical and sustainable solutions that connect people and enable them to benefit from ICT. As an independent not-for-profit foundation, we put knowledge, innovation and finance to work with partners from the public, private and not-for profit sectors. Together, we can make a world of difference.

IICD is active in Africa, Latin-America and the Caribbean, where we create and enhance development opportunities in education, good governance, livelihoods, health and the environment. Our approach includes linking local, national and international organisations as well as formulating and implementing ICT-supported development policies and projects.

IICD was established by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996. Our core funders include the Dutch Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss

