



Measuring what matters: Conversations on the Monitoring and Evaluating process of policy

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Decolonising MEL: why?

Community projects aimed at sparking systemic change are often burdened with the need to draft lengthy and technical reports for donors. The process of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) is time- and resource-consuming, requiring extensive data collection to measure change - yet some changes are intangible or take longer to become visible within target groups. One solution to address this issue is to shift away from pre-defined quality indicators established by donors, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and instead trust local communities and their knowledge to measure what truly matters.



Key insights from the session:

- ❖ There is often a mismatch between what must be reported and what actually matters to the target groups.
- ❖ With donors taking precedence in the MEL process, the voices and insights of local communities are often missed. The emphasis tends to be more on monitoring than on learning.
- ❖ The focus on quantifiable data and technical rigor in reporting stems from principles borrowed from the natural sciences, which carry implicit biases and specific values that may not align with decolonising movements. This approach is also resource-intensive and places a burden on local CSOs.



The MFA and other donors often prioritize quantifiable data, yet the requirement for cost-effectiveness reporting frequently overshadows equity considerations. Equity is essential for enabling most target groups, who need to be heard through participatory measures. A valuable approach for this aim is to organize ground-level panels, as these individuals are the most impacted by the policy, and to present their conclusions to high-level panels. While participatory monitoring and evaluation may be resource-intensive, it ultimately aligns with the project's intent: empowering communities by making their voices heard leads to better outcomes.

“Not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything that is measured matters”.



Systemic change does not happen overnight.

The focus should shift from rigid reporting strategies to trusting local populations and their knowledge in monitoring and evaluating what truly matters. New dimensions need to be incorporated, and fresh discussions are essential to redefine what should be measured. It's a quest to find meaningful ways to convey their stories.

Ultimately, who decides what matters?

Some changes are intangible; not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything measured truly matters.

Who says qualitative findings aren't sufficient if they hold meaning for the local community? The field itself is ambiguous, and systemic change is often slow. The time-bound nature of the M&E cycle limits the ability to capture transformation and draw meaningful conclusions.



To grant equitable access to the Global South, target communities must be involved in the M&E cycle. By fostering discussions between donors and communities in the Global South, new dimensions can be incorporated into the process. Decolonization is a lengthy transformational movement that requires taking small, deliberate steps. The learning phase is often overlooked by donors. Establishing mutual trust in partnerships and actively involving the target population in the MEL cycle is a crucial first step.



For the future, it is essential to incorporate youth perspectives, as younger generations often inherit the mindsets of those before them. Organizations must remain true to their mission and vision regarding decolonization, serving as a liaison between local communities and donors while advancing the shift the power movement. Regarding the MEL process, the ultimate goal is to reduce the burden of reporting while enhancing the value of the information shared and empower the unheard voices of the Global South.

Measuring what matters: Decolonising Monitoring & Evaluation

Panelists:

- Peter van der Knaap - IOB
- Clara Bosco - Better by Codesign
- Tarini Shipurkar- Praxis Institute for Participatory practices India
- Lori Cajegas - Giving for Change/MEL- COP Partos