

Seminar Summary Day 3: Creating an Enabling Environment for M&E Community of Practice

We had yet another interesting day of this MEASURE Evaluation seminar on creating an enabling environment to strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practice for HIV/ AIDS and other health programs. As we concluded Day 3 of our 5-day Seminar, 91 LeaderNauts from 26 countries in 4 continents visited the site today, and 45 of you made 69 posts. Congratulations!

The posts that streamed in the whole day were full of fresh ideas and perspectives on how to address some of the breakdowns in the Abunesia case study regarding their national surveillance and detection system.

Thank you for sharing such a wide range of good, thoughtful ideas. Your collective experience is enormously valuable.

Monju in Cameron stresses the importance of a country-led system: “when all the M&E systems are owned at all levels, better results are achieved.”

Mashooq in Afghanistan adds the need to invest in organizational capacity: “proper structures and systems need to be put in place including very clear roles and responsibility from the top to the bottom. Functional communication channels need to be put in place for dissemination of information and feedback from the high level.” While **James in the Philippines** reminds us of the missing link in the network of systems: “Abunesia's central and regional systems are integrated or work in close coordination with each other therefore the missing piece is the link between them and the local system, i.e. the provinces and municipalities. This link should be firmly established in an inclusive environment that fosters cooperation rather than turfing and/or professional jealousy.”

Stephen in Kenya and many other participants point to the critical role of leadership and stewardship: “In order to strengthen data management, there is strong need for leadership to promote the collection, collation and utilization of data for decision making and this involves providing administrative/financial support to address the costs involved.”

Niyi in Australia highlights the need for a system-wide, integrated approach: “from a capacity building perspective, Abunesia’s ESR system requires reforms in organizational, programmatic and adaptive capacities in order to improve efficiency and optimize outcomes. Organizational capacity building entails, for example, ensuring better communication between the central office and field units of the ESR department. This may require the use of appropriate formal communication systems (e.g. policies and electronic communications). Programmatic capacity building entails, for example, improving the quality of staff training, providing adequate laboratory support, and allocating adequate logistics such as transport facilities to field staff. Adaptive capacity building entails, for example, reducing exposure, and enhancing recovery from disease.”

This fictitious case study reminds us that enhancing national disease surveillance systems requires the integration of several technical and organizational disciplines. These include workforce capacity and competencies (skills and ability to recognize unusual disease patterns), but also organizational and

systems capacity (essential infrastructure, strategic planning, communication mechanisms, laws, rules and regulations that govern the system). All this needs to take place in a structured and informed design process, especially in a deeply decentralized system like Abonesia. And the implementation and monitoring of the set of interventions ought to differ based on the context/level (national, provincial, municipality, community). I am sure we all operate in such complex, open, often unpredictable systems requiring new mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement and learning.

The success of such an approach primarily lies in the careful planning and implementation of a system-wide process that fosters communication and collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders who may just be “seeing” one segment and not the full picture of the complex system. Leadership at all levels is another element that most of you mentioned as being pivotal to any efforts to coordinate or introduce changes in such a system in order to make it more agile and responsive. Also, any changes to the existing system need to take into account not just technical case detection or testing capabilities, including lab capacity, but also address financing, management, structure, creative networking and governance implications, and also identify sustainability strategies.

Often, what is required is a thoughtful, holistic approach that takes into consideration all the key elements of success. In other words, availability and application of standard operating procedures, improved mechanisms for communication and stakeholder participation, enhanced understanding of how the system actually functions in terms of pressure points and weak links, and organizational improvements are the true measures of success.

Finally, tomorrow (Day 4 of the seminar) we shall explore how we can build and sustain country-owned and country-led M&E systems.