

Seminar Summary Day 2: Creating an Enabling Environment for M&E Community of Practice

We had a rich second 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 2 of our 5-day Seminar, 127 LeaderNauts from 31 countries in 4 Continents visited the site today, and 50 of you made 62 posts. This is fantastic - give yourselves a big round of virtual applause! Please encourage your friends and colleagues to join the conversation.

The discussions and exchanges were rich, varied and insightful. It was good to see that many of you enjoyed the scavenger hunt in the Capacity Building Knowledge Exchange database, and that you were able to find some new organizational capacity building tools and resources that you could use/adapt to strengthen your M&E programs as well as other health programs. Some of you requested more information on specific tools and we provided you with additional links that you could pursue.

The responses to the discussion thread on what makes M&E teams/units successful were extravagantly rich. But there were also some common patterns that emerged. Success seemed to be imbued with or determined by certain common “people values” and features such as commitment, passion, and connectedness.

Eddah Karijo in Kenya alerted us to the need to go back to basics – “I would advise that for any program/project that is being started, there should be an M&E unit which is budgeted for. This would make the organization more efficient and effective than trying to fix a unit much later or as a condition from donors.” **Juliana in Mozambique** thought her “M&E was successful at that time because we were all committed to the goal and objectives of the program.”

Sara, Ethiopia adds: “The team also agreed on a monthly participatory monitoring which was effective in meeting the program targets. This experience has also served us a great team building exercise.”

James in the Philippines expounds on a team approach: “Program coordinators held periodic program implementation reviews where we shared our experiences, resolved issues and made adjustments to improve the programs.”

Musa in Nigeria spoke for many of you by stressing the importance of genuine inclusiveness - “Participation (Inclusive process) in setting goals, selecting key activities and processes and identifying indicators to measure result (outputs, outcome and impact). I mean inclusion all the way.”

Velida in Bosnia and Herzegovina threw in a cautionary note, based on experience, regarding the actual process of enhancing. He says, “I would like to stress, though, that participation needs to be properly ‘dosed’ to ensure right participation of the right people at the right time. I have participated in many processes where over-participation has had negative rather than positive effect. The process became too watered-down, the technical quality of the system was jeopardized, etc. Instead of ensuring ownership and buy-in it had a counter-effect of becoming too overwhelming for everyone involved.”

Your posts also revealed an important factor about organizational capacity building, whether it's conducted to strengthen M&E or any other function within an organization – it is best understood and most productively pursued, when the process is co-created from within the realities and needs of all the team members and relevant stakeholders. It is also not a linear technical process. It grows in fits and starts and is likely to succeed when we create or invest in some value-based and people-focused enabling environment - an environment that affirms the role of data and data-driven decision making, values each member of the team and inspires them to focus on a common goal or vision.

In other words, in order to create strong and effective M&E units we need more than good tools and technical approaches. Building and strengthening our M&E units is a bit like preparing a rich curry meal. Making the meal requires skills, focused commitment, fresh local ingredients and good timing. There are certain staple ingredients that most of you mentioned in your posts – strong high level leadership and management systems, clear process for making decisions and communication, participatory team approaches on data collection, analysis and reporting, and following through on commitments and holding each other accountable for results. It's only after mixing all these and other ingredients carefully in your own pot will you end up with a wholesome and tasty meal that you can all enjoy!

Finally, tomorrow (Day 3 of the seminar) we shall use a case study to discuss how we can use a systems-approach to strengthen epidemiological surveillance.