

Conflict-Sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation

Keys for Successful Programming



CAP

CAPABLE PARTNERS PROGRAM

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is critical to any program's design and implementation under all circumstances. Monitoring is an ongoing process of data collection that allows managers and stakeholders to see whether or not a project is on course, to examine positive and negative trends, and to adjust strategies accordingly. The regular review of collected monitoring data provides opportunities to assess and plan any project implementation changes that are needed to get a project "back on track." Evaluation is the measurement of project outcomes (short-term effects) or impacts (long-term effects). It also may be used to assess why a project is or is not meeting its objectives.

Implementing projects in conflict-prone or conflict-affected areas requires more frequent monitoring and, to the greatest extent possible, program flexibility. Relief and development interventions unintentionally may exacerbate conflicts or create new ones because of the method used to distribute aid, the choice of partners, a lack of consideration of existing circumstances or other issues. Effective M&E is useful in identifying the extent to which a project is on course and/or underlying assumptions are correct and thus may suggest adjustments in program strategy or implementation.

"Conflict-sensitive monitoring and evaluation" refers to the particular way M&E may be carried out in conflict-prone or conflict-affected environments. The actual tools and methods for M&E will be the same as those used in non-conflict environments, but the conflict context will provide the framework in which to implement them. Monitoring, for example, in conflict areas may be used to ensure that unintended consequences of a particular program intervention are minimized or, at the very least, are acknowledged and anticipated.

A powerful management tool, conflict-sensitive M&E examines the interaction between a project and its context and can help implementers and donors make important decisions about redirecting funds, curtailing programs or establishing new activities. To understand this interaction, processes should be designed to take into account the need to understand the context and changes in the context, the need to understand the development intervention and its implementation, and the need to measure the interaction between the two.

Conflict-sensitive M&E uses three types of indicators: 1) indicators to monitor the progression of conflict factors against an appropriate baseline and against which to set contingency planning; 2) indicators to monitor the project's efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability; and 3) indicators to measure the interaction between the context and the project. The M&E system includes indicators and matrices, but is not just a tool or document that sits on a shelf; it is an approach to ensure that the project is running as intended. However, M&E techniques in conflict (and non-conflict) contexts are only as good as the ability and willingness to revisit assumptions and, if possible, amend programs when necessary.

Key Principles for Conflict-Sensitive M&E

Identify and involve stakeholders in monitoring, evaluation and resulting changes

The first step to creating an effective program is to identify all the stakeholders involved, including donors, partners, and those who might benefit from the activity, as well as those who might feel that the activity is not benefiting them.

In order to develop an effective M&E system, perspectives from all the stakeholders must be taken into consideration. Once there is agreement among the primary stakeholders over what needs to be monitored and who needs the various pieces of information, it is easier to develop a comprehensive system that reflects the complexity of the constellation of actors without overburdening any one group. Include stakeholders in data gathering and make sure that stakeholders have access to project data that affect their communities.

If and when it becomes clear that a change needs to take place in a program, stakeholders need to be included in the process. If the stakeholders have been involved since the beginning of the process and there has been a common understanding of project objectives, negotiating change should not be as difficult.

Distribute M&E responsibility among project implementers

It may be necessary to identify one person as an M&E specialist to manage the overall system, but it is important that the responsibility for data collection be distributed among those people who are working to implement the activities on a daily basis.

Carry out conflict analysis prior to program design and throughout the project

Effective, conflict-sensitive programming must include sufficient conflict analysis prior to program design, as well as an iterative M&E process that includes conflict analysis throughout the duration of the project. Conflict analysis should include peace assets as well as identify root causes and triggers of conflict. Good program design must take into account assumptions related to political stability and the potential for conflict. These assumptions should be continually checked. In some contexts, ill-timed or inappropriate program interventions may become literally a matter of life and death.

Allow flexibility in activity timing to respond to conflict dynamics

Infusing conflict sensitivity into the monitoring and evaluation processes and project activities may require changes in timing to be responsive to the dynamics of a conflict. In addition, if donor or other institutional factors drive decisions about when to monitor and evaluate, these should be systematically reviewed to assess the impact of the timing on the context.

Keep a broad view and examine the project in the larger political context

Examine the project in the larger political context. Remember that although a civil society organization may consider itself neutral, it is a political player in a conflict context. Pay attention to the conflict contexts in neighboring countries or regions. Localized conflicts easily may spill into the geographic region of work and affect the project.

Capable Partners Program Workshop

Conflict-Sensitive Programming through Monitoring and Evaluation

USAID's **Capable Partners Program (CAP)** designed and facilitated a pilot workshop in Ghana in November 2004 for USAID staff, international PVOs and local NGOs on conflict-sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E). [CAP is implemented by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and its partner, Management Systems International (MSI).] The workshop was funded by USAID/Private Voluntary Cooperation—American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (PVC-ASHA) and USAID/Bureau for Africa (AFR). It was developed by the following collaborators: USAID/PVC-ASHA, USAID/AFR, USAID/West Africa Regional Program (WARP), USAID/Office on Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), MSI and AED.

The workshop aimed to: 1) increase participants' understanding of how working in conflict environments affects programs, and how these programs can affect conflicts; 2) increase participants' appreciation of the utility of conflict-sensitive M&E as part of ongoing program design, management, and implementation and of the linkages between M&E; 3) identify ways that organizations can design and implement effective programs with M&E plans and carry out strategic partnerships through conflict-sensitive M&E; 4) identify factors to help ensure that M&E results in conflict-affected areas contribute to organizational learning through gathering and incorporating lessons learned; and 5) encourage the mutual sharing of the participants' knowledge and experience through a variety of interactive approaches.

The workshop showed how closer links can and need to be made between conflict environments and program objectives and impacts, so that development programs can be more effective in mitigating conflict, or at least not worsening it. For

most participants, the pilot workshop was the first time these issues were presented collectively and systematically.

The workshop brought out several key points:

- Many assistance programs in these contexts cannot, by their mere operation, reduce conflict or bolster capacities for peace. Critical elements in M&E are handled differently in a conflict-affected environment. M&E in areas of conflict may use similar methods as standard M&E, but the specific procedures and substance of analyses may differ.
- Peace building involves processes and pays attention to good project design and implementation, which cannot be achieved in isolation from M&E. Consequently, it is important to integrate conflict-sensitive M&E in all stages, steps or phases of program/project planning, design and implementation. Careful analysis of the nature and aspects of conflict the programs are facing, and specific review and redesign of program details and effects, is needed.
- The processes of conflict assessment, monitoring and evaluation are best done as a collaboration among multiple donors, their partners and other actors. Individual programs, even if found to perform well in terms of their specific indicators, need to add up to an effective strategy that addresses the manifold dimensions of the conflict.
- The adaptation of M&E methods to conflict environments holds major implications for USAID, PVO and NGO staff in the design and oversight of programs.

For more information about CAP and Conflict-Sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation Workshops, email CAP at NGOConnect@AED.org or visit CAP's Web portal, www.NGOconnect.NET

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