Learning from M&E

Virtual Learning Event on Monitoring and Evaluation for National Adaptation in Pacific Small Island Developing States


Paddy Pringle, Climate Analytics/SPREP
Purpose of this session

- Why learning matters
- Why it is sometimes difficult to learn
- How can we use M&E to learn?
What does learning mean?

• O’Dell and Hubert (2011) refer to it as *new knowledge that is used to shape behaviour, as manifested in decision-taking or actions.*

• To make evidence-based improvements to systems and processes in the context of the urgent challenge of climate change.
Learning and M&E

• Learning is implied in M&E
  – The assumption that we assess and gather evidence in order to **learn** and **act upon** that learning.

• Growing appreciation of the importance and potential of M&E as a means of learning
  – It does not happen automatically; how we approach M&E can help or hinder learning

• Learning needs insights into how and why change occurred
  – This requires more than just indicators
Why learning matters for adaptation

• Significant, radical and rapid adjustments to ‘business as usual’ societal decisions are likely to be needed
• Urgency and cost do not allow us the luxury of a trial and error approach
• CCA is still an emerging field, effectiveness of adaptation policies and actions is poorly understood
• There may be winners and losers resulting from adaptation
Barriers to learning through M&E

• M&E approaches may be shaped by funders rather than decision-makers such as national authorities (OECD, 2015) or communities.
  
  • Creates tensions between accountability and learning objectives - emphasis on reporting and tracking agreed actions, rather than on reflection and learning
  
  • Pressure to spend
Barriers to learning through M&E

- A lack of incentives to learn (and disincentives to talk about failure)
- Only considering lessons that appear immediately relevant within the spatial, temporal and thematic boundaries of a given funding stream
- Staff turnover and losses of institutional memory
- Lessons not reaching decision-makers in a timely and accessible form.
A growing focus on learning?

- Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015) acknowledges the role of ‘Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning from adaptation plans, policies, programmes and actions’ (Article 7, paragraph 9d)
- DFID’s BRACED programme actively designed learning into M&E approaches at the start
- Climate Investment Funds (CIF) have established the Evaluation and Learning Special Initiative
How do we learn more effectively through M&E?

• Ensure purpose/objective of M&E is clear from the outset
  – Establish learning objectives

• Improve alignment between quantifiable metrics and qualitative narratives
  – Both important tools that should be complementary.

• What we need to measure for accountability may be quite different to what we need to learn.

• Consider multiple perspectives
  – Success may look different from different perspectives
How do we learn more effectively through M&E?

• Be prepared to learn the unexpected
  – Cast the net wide

• Look beyond the question ‘are we doing/did we do what we said we would’

• Speak to those who are not always heard
  – Consider performance from multiple perspectives, not just those set when the activity was designed

• Timeliness matters – can what you learn make a difference?
Monitoring and evaluating learning

• Technical learning
  – Ways of improving projects and programmes e.g. irrigation techniques

• Social learning
  – Creating ways of learning through sharing knowledge and experience e.g. communities of practice

• Systemic learning
  – Improving systems, policymaking processes

• These might need to be measured in different ways
Conclusions

• Learning seems an obvious purpose of M&E but it doesn’t just happen!
• Learning is vital for climate change M&E given the urgency and emergent nature of actions
• We need to make more time for learning in M&E and consider how we communicate lessons