Equal Access Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit

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Helping communication for development organisations to demonstrate impact, listen and learn, and improve their practices

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Toolkit contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

AC4SC Assessing Communication for Social Change project

C4D Communication for development

CFSC Communication for Social Change

CLFS Critical Listening and Feedback Sessions

CRs Community researchers

DOC Domains of change

EAN Equal Access Nepal

EAR Ethnographic Action Research

FDGs Focus group discussions

MSC Most Significant Change technique

M&E Monitoring and evaluation

NN Naya Nepal (New Nepal) radio program

PM&E Participatory monitoring and evaluation

QDA Qualitative data analysis

SQS Short questionnaire survey

SSMK Saathi Sanga Manka Khura (Chatting with my best friend) radio program

TOC Theory of change

Introduction and background to the Equal Access Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation toolkit

What is this toolkit?

This toolkit provides a series of modules that you can use in your organisation to find out how well you are doing and what impacts your communication for development (C4D) programs are making. It is a key outcome of the *Assessing Communication for Social Change* (AC4SC) project which was undertaken in collaboration with Equal Access Nepal and Equal Access International. The toolkit is guided by principles of the Communication for Social Change approach to C4D (see box below) and the principles of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E). It also based on recent ideas about effective evaluation and evaluation capacity development and our learnings from the AC4SC project.

Either the entire toolkit, or individual modules can be used. The toolkit takes a participatory approach to this task, and will encourage you to include as many people and stakeholders in your monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work as possible. It is largely qualitative, because through qualitative approaches you often learn something new and unexpected and gather rich insights into the subtle processes involved in social change. However, we encourage you to use a range of methods in your M&E work, including tools that will provide useful quantitative data.

Core principles of Communication for Social Change

- Meaningful involvement of people directly affected by an issue in all steps of the process (from dialogue to impact assessment).
- The belief that every voice should be listened to and heard.
- Participation in and local ownership of the communication process and the content of the communication.
- Local control of and access to communication is essential. A bottom up approach is favoured.
- Collective decision-making and collective action.
- Equity and respect for local cultures, cultural identify, beliefs and knowledge. The belief that what is happening in the community has an impact on the communication process and that effective communication must have an impact on communities as well as on individuals.
- Both private and public dialogue and negotiation is essential to communication and for lasting social change.

(adapted from Byrne et al., 2005, page 2)

M&E findings can challenge your ideas and assumptions about your audiences and the communities you are trying to reach, in very helpful ways. Your project is likely to fail if you don't understand your audiences and their issues. You may think that you know, perhaps from your own experience, or statistics, what your audiences think, and what they need … but when was the last time you checked?

This process involves taking risks, and challenging yourselves. Becoming an open, participatory, learning organisation presents a series of challenges - it may not be easy to give authority to, and deal appropriately with people who you consider to be less 'knowledgeable' on certain topics; it may challenge you to respect the ideas and views and experiences of others with different views from your own.

Equally it provides a series of opportunities – it allows you to be in close and meaningful collaboration with the people and groups who mean most to your work and organisation; it will help you to understand things from their points of view.

We think it's important to take **a long-term perspective that emphasises the benefits of participatory M&E, which are outweighed by the time and other resources required to effectively use PM&E**. These benefits include:

- Flexibility of the process
- Increased ownership of and engagement in the evaluation by program participants and other key stakeholders
- Better quality evaluation findings and outcomes
- Better use of evaluation results and recommendations
- Strengthened evaluation capacities
- Improved program impacts.

This toolkit is designed to help you navigate these challenges and make the most of these opportunities and benefits. It will ask you a series of questions, and in doing so, challenge you to think about what you are prepared to do in order to answer them.

Overview of the toolkit modules

This toolkit consists of six modules:

Module 1: Effective communication, feedback and reporting systems in a PM&E process
Module 2: Setting objectives and indicators
Module 3: Research and PM&E methods
Module 4: Critical Listening and Feedback Sessions
Module 5: Doing qualitative data analysis
Module 6: Getting started and planning for PM&E and impact assessment

In addition, the toolkit contains a detailed Community Researcher manual and Most Significant Change technique manual and a list of useful resources, information and tools.

The following describes the main outcomes from using these six modules:

Module 1: Effective communication, feedback and reporting systems in a PM&E process

This module aims to help you understand:

- how to analyse the stakeholder groups you want to engage in PM&E, their different roles, and how they will work together in the process
- how to map the communication flows and connections between stakeholders engaged in PM&E and identify and address communication barriers and issues
- how to identify who needs your PM&E outputs, what they need to know, and when they need to know it
- how to assess your communication and reporting capacities and needs
- the need to factor in sufficient time for PM&E processes into reporting cycles
- some possible strategies for preventing communication problems

Module 2: Setting objectives and indicators

This module aims to help you understand:
- the concept of indicators and what they can and cannot tell us
- how to set objectives and indicators
- why they are important
- how they can help you to assess the progress of your project
- the difference between SMART and SPICED indicators
- the importance of working closely with stakeholders to set indicators and define what change means to them

Module 3: Research and PM&E methods

This module aims to help you understand:
- how to collect rich qualitative data to understand your potential audiences and the impacts your programs have on them
- some key qualitative and short survey methods and when to use them
- what will make you a good facilitator, and how this is important in participatory approaches to M&E
- how to deepen and improve your data, and to probe important issues

Module 4: Critical Listening and Feedback Sessions

This module aims to help you understand:
- why radio programs targeted to C4D need Critical Listening and Feedback Sessions (CLFS) built into the organisation
- how CLFS can improve your radio programs
- the steps involved in undertaking CLFS
- how the process can be used with listeners in the community
- how the process can be used for pre and post tests of your radio programs
- how CLFS outcomes can be triangulated with other findings to get more rigorous results
- some of the challenges and limitations in using this method

Module 5: Doing qualitative data analysis

This module aims to help you understand:
- how good quality qualitative data analysis (QDA) can help you identify impacts of your programs to better meet your objectives and the needs of the community
- the steps involved in undertaking basic QDA, including repeated reading, analysis and interpretation
- the value of involving others in the QDA process
- the difference between description and interpretation
- the value of seeking feedback on your analysis and using triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of findings

Module 6: Getting started and planning for PM&E and impact assessment

This module aims to help you understand:

- The key steps to effectively developing a PM&E plan
- How to plan in terms of time, people and resources
- How to deal with power, gender, literacy and sensitive issues
- The ethical issues you need to consider when doing PM&E

Each of these modules includes several examples and other information provided by the M&E team at Equal Access Nepal. They are based on the tools that the M&E team and the community researchers used, the data they collected and analysed, and their actual experiences with and learnings from the AC4SC project. Some of the examples were modified to better illustrate various tools and processes.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed primarily for staff who are responsible for planning, conducting and championing M&E within your organisation. It is specifically designed to suit the needs of C4D practitioners.

A range of staff should be involved in PM&E processes - management, program managers and strategists, M&E staff, and content creators. Creating or maintaining good communication between staff groups is valuable for the process, and the process can in turn help to improve good communication in your organisation.

For a participatory evaluation process to be sustainable in the long term, strong support and involvement from those in leadership positions within your organisation, and program stakeholders is required, along with a willingness to be open and honest about things that are not working well and what we can learn from our evaluation activities. Good internal and external communications are necessary. We provide ideas on how to ensure you maintain good communications in **Module 1: Effective communication, feedback and reporting systems in a PM&E process**.

Why use this toolkit?

Becoming a learning organisation

Monitoring, evaluating, and assessing the impact of your communication activities will tell you how well you are achieving your objectives. It can tell you if you need to rethink your objectives and ways of doing things. It will help you improve your programs, and find out if groups that you wish to work with are responding to your work. This toolkit will help you become a learning organisation. It will help you reflect on your own work, and listen to what people think of you and your programs. It provides a series of modules and tools designed to help you achieve this.

Do you want to become a learning organisation?
What do you think will improve if you do?

Improving practices and demonstrating impact

By becoming a reflective, learning organisation, your practices are likely to improve and become more effective. As this happens you will achieve greater social change and other impacts. If you actively listen to what those you are trying to reach think of your work, engage with them in a dialogue about how it has had an impact on their lives and communities, and what they would like you to do in the future, then you are not only able to demonstrate impact, but also adapt to ensure your work remains relevant, useful and appropriate. Communication for development is often focused on getting people to listen to our messages:

How often do you to listen to messages from your audiences?
How often do you ask them questions?

When should this toolkit be used?

Building evaluation practices and processes into the day-to-day work of your communications organisation is the best way to improve your work, and be in a position to demonstrate impact. The ideal scenario is an evaluation system that is ongoing and flexible. It is focussed on program improvement. It is part of the overall activity of an organisation, included in program and project planning and management cycles. It encourages regular monitoring and longer-term embedded research. A simplified diagram of the PM&E cycle is shown in the **Equal Access Community Researcher manual** in this toolkit.

While you may not be able to achieve this all at once, this toolkit is designed to help you gradually meet that ideal.

Alternatively, you can take up modules and individual tools as you are able to make use of them, depending on the purpose of the M&E work, time available, and other resources. The

more you learn through good PM&E practices, the more your organisation is likely to want to invest in further strengthening your PM&E capacity.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation

The PM&E approach used in this toolkit actively engages all key stakeholders in all aspects of the process. It is based on fundamental values of trust, ownership, empowerment, inclusion, and openness to ongoing learning and improvement. It can allow local knowledge to be incorporated into our M&E processes, and helps to create a clearer picture of what is happening at the grassroots level.

PM&E should be seen as integral to the rest of your organisation's work, so that useful information can continuously and quickly be fed into your programs to improve them. Used effectively and appropriately, PM&E will strengthen the research and evaluation capacities of staff and stakeholders, and increase their sense of ownership and commitment to the process. In PM&E, the processes that people engage in together are seen as just as important as the recommendations and findings in PM&E reports or feedback meetings.

Essential ingredients needed to make PM&E work in your organisation

1. Receptive context – PM&E works best when your organisation is prepared to listen and learn.
2. The evaluation team's commitment to participation and faith in the inherent capacity of people to contribute meaningfully to the PM&E process.
3. Recognition that PM&E takes time and resources; it cannot be rushed.
4. People skills — particularly facilitation — are a key part of the participatory evaluator's toolkit. Willingness to share experiences, knowledge, insights, and perhaps most difficult, power.
5. Capacity development should be a PM&E objective. Capacity development enhances accountability and supports sustainability through community and leadership development, creating a core of participants who are committed to the program/initiative and knowledgeable about it.
6. The process should be structured in such a way that ensures participation of the different interest groups but must be easy to facilitate because local facilitators may be themselves inexperienced in participatory techniques.

(adapted from Parks et al., 2005, page 14)

Definitions of key terms

It is important to have a clear understanding of what we mean by the key terms used in this toolkit, since they are often used in different ways. The definitions provided here were developed in collaboration with EAN staff as part of the AC4SC project.

Monitoring:

A systematic and ongoing process of collecting, analysing and using information about the progress of programs and activities over time, and their strengths and limitations, to help guide and improve our programs and assess outputs and activities.

Evaluation:

Determining, through systematic, regular research, the value that primary stakeholders and others place on our programs and activities, and their outcomes, in order to improve their effectiveness and sustainability, better reach our objectives, and make good decisions about future programming.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation:

Developing a partnership between the primary stakeholders in a program to collaboratively design and systematically implement an M&E process, develop tools, set objectives and indicators, and share concerns, experiences and learnings.

Impact assessment:

Understanding and assessing the lasting social changes brought about in whole or in part by programs and activities, among the primary stakeholders in the mid to long-term.

Social change:

Specific and wide-ranging intended and unintended changes (in such things as community dialogue, knowledge, attitude and behaviour), identified by primary stakeholders and others, which are social in nature and directly or indirectly related to their involvement in programs. Social change refers to changes to a social system, not simply change at the individual level, even if that individual change is mirrored in a number of individuals.

Basic information about impact assessment and social change is provided in the **Equal Access Community Researcher manual** in this toolkit.

Differences between monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment

Evaluation

Evaluation involves undertaking regular, systematic research that enables mutual learning and understanding about the activities, opinions and experiences of audiences and others. It helps to assess the outcomes and impacts of programs. To do so, we first need a clear understanding of the objectives of programs. Our evaluation will then pay attention to such things as:

- The ways in which programs are thought about, researched, developed, planned and delivered; and
- How listeners receive, think about and respond to programs.

Evaluation answers a range of questions, based on questions such as: who wants to know what and why? It attempts to improve program effectiveness, quality and sustainability by learning from research findings in an ongoing way. For example, key evaluation questions could include:

- How well are programs and associated activities achieving their objectives?
- How can they be improved to better meet the diverse needs of community members and create positive social change?
- How well are programs responding to and incorporating audience feedback and input from stakeholders?

Monitoring

When we monitor programs the main focus is on program inputs, outputs, activities, performance and progress, rather than on how well objectives have been met. For example, monitoring could include the regular review of letters and other feedback from listeners to inform decisions about what issues to include in future programs. Monitoring of audience feedback can also determine whether program messages are understood and are having an impact on audiences.

Regular monitoring enables us to describe local community contexts and impacts, and to identify the strengths and limitations of our programs – the things that are working well or not working so well. Results of this feedback and analysis can then be fed directly into project management and planning processes so that changes to improve programs and activities can be made quickly. Monitoring is the key to good planning. If monitoring systems are working well, evaluation of programs is needed less often and is much easier to carry out.

Impact assessment

Impact assessment is a particular form of evaluation. It is not a separate activity but can be the focus of any monitoring or evaluation. Compared with M&E, impact assessment is less specific and also considers external, contextual factors that influence the impacts of our programs, such as changes in the use of various communication technologies.

In Equal Access, impact assessment is likely to concentrate on looking for significant changes in the lives of people and communities, and in community organisations and groups (such as listener clubs) in the mid to long-term. It is not about immediate and direct predicted outputs of our programs, but how social change is brought about in more long-term and/or in wider ranging ways. These impacts are not able to be defined in advance – they might be

predicted, but are as likely to be unexpected and unintended. They might be both positive and negative.

We need to be alert to and seek evidence of impact in terms of long-lasting changes at all times, through ongoing embedded PM&E. This enables us to document the stages and steps leading to change. We also need to be aware that other activities and processes might be partly responsible for the changes we identify. We can explore and try to describe the role we think our programs and activities have played in these changes.

A key question for impact assessments is:

In what ways do programs lead to social change beyond the short-term delivery and reception of the programs?

The answers might include impact in terms of changes in broadcasting content and styles, as well as improved knowledge and understanding among target key groups and resulting changes in social attitudes and behaviour around issues that your programs deal with, such as HIV prevention and peace and reconciliation.

Basic principles – participation and planning

Participation

Participation requires a deliberate effort to work closely with your primary stakeholders. It requires that you design, plan and implement the evaluation process together; develop tools, set indicators, and share concerns, experiences and learnings. Stakeholders might include your staff, audiences, local communities, NGOs, donors, and anyone else who is important to your work. Different stakeholders are likely to have different levels of involvement in this process.

Participation requires commitment to be open and available to listen and learn from others who often have different experiences, agendas, needs and knowledge. You will need to facilitate participation from stakeholders.

Are you committed to taking a participatory approach to your evaluation?
What would this mean for you?

Planning

It is important to carefully plan your M&E work. You will need to ask yourself why you are doing this work, what you want to find out, how you might best go about this, and how you will use your data. The toolkit modules must be used to suit your needs, related to your objectives. You will need to ask yourself a series of questions:

Why am I doing M&E work?
What information am I seeking?

What methods are best suited to each M&E activity?
Where will I carry out this M&E work?
What resources will I need?
How will I use the M&E results?

Module 6: Getting started and planning for PM&E and impact assessment will help you to answer these questions and develop an appropriate PM&E plan.

Basic processes - listening and learning

Listening

Often when you think about evaluating your C4D activities you will think about measuring the numbers of people who have listened to your programs, and you will try to work out what changes it has brought about for them. To really understand those changes, you need to turn the tables, and listen to your listeners, and to those who you would like to listen to you.

Listening is an act of recognition, it signals that you are interested in the views and experiences of others, and willing to consider and respect what they have to say. You will need to listen across difference – different contexts, different people and cultures - to create a rich and clear picture of what is happening at the grassroots level and how this might be affecting the outcomes and impacts of your programs. The toolkit will give you some guidance on how you might go about this.

Are you interested in listening to your listeners?

Learning

Listening to others is interesting and can be fun, but in terms of evaluation, it is pointless unless you learn from this experience. Use the knowledge you gain from listening, to systematically process it and feed learning back into your organisation and its practices. If you want people to listen to you and act on what you say, you must also listen and learn from them.

Are you willing to learn from your listeners and others who are involved in your programs?

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is designed to be easy to use. It often presents quite complex ideas in bite sized, simplified form. Because of this, we have attached a series of links, to give you the option, if you like, to follow up and learn more.

Essentially, you can pick up and use parts of the toolkit individually, or you can work your way through the whole. Ideally, and certainly if you want to develop a comprehensive

impact assessment process in your organisation, you would think of PM&E as an ongoing, embedded part of your activities, and work towards a fully fledged PM&E system for impact assessment. Using the exercises and steps in **Modules 1 and 6** will help you to develop an effective PM&E system.

You might use this toolkit as an individual, or use it in your organisation to facilitate a workshop. The more people in your organisation you can involve in the PM&E process, including planning and implementation, the better. These people can also be involved in the data analysis, and in the preparation and sharing of reports and other outputs created using the data you collect.

Where this toolkit came from

This toolkit emerged from the *Assessing Communication for Social Change* project. AC4SC is a four year research project which was jointly implemented by Equal Access Nepal, Equal Access International, and two universities in Australia: Queensland University of Technology and the University of Adelaide. Funding was provided by the Australian Research Council through their Linkage Project Scheme, and Equal Access Nepal.

The project aimed to develop an effective methodology for monitoring and evaluating communication for social change initiatives, and to develop more appropriate indicators of social change in collaboration with community members. It included setting up a network of community researchers in five different locations in rural and regional Nepal, strengthening the M&E systems of EAN and developing the skills, knowledge and experience of staff and community researchers in PM&E.

Feedback on the toolkit

We welcome your feedback on this toolkit – what works well, what doesn't work so well and how it could be improved. We are also very interested in learning more about how you have used this toolkit and how effective it was in helping your organisation to assess the impacts of your C4D programs, strengthen your M&E systems, and become a learning organisation. Please send your feedback to Jo Tacchi at jo.tacchi@rmit.edu.au

References for the toolkit

As well as our learnings from the activities of the AC4SC project, the development of this toolkit was informed by an ongoing series of literature reviews relating to the participatory evaluation of C4D programs and evaluation capacity development in the development context. The following lists some of the many resources and publications that were drawn on to develop the toolkit modules and the Equal Access Community Researcher manual. Some of them are cited in the modules.

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