Seminar Summary Day 4: Creating an Enabling Environment for M&E Community of Practice

We had a productive fourth 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 4 of our 5-day Seminar, 80 LeaderNauts from 21 countries in 4 continents visited the site today, and 39 of you made 55 posts. Congratulations!

The discussion threads, daily summaries and readings of all the previous days are available on the website, giving you the opportunity to follow the conversations and catch up on what you may have missed. We are also glad that most of you found the article for today's reading useful and relevant to your work. Please share it with your team members and other colleagues who might be interested. Today's discussion thread: "*What types of technical assistance and change efforts are needed to strengthen and institutionalize "country led and country owned," learning-oriented M&E practices?*" generated a wide array of rich responses.

Dr. Adirieje in Nigeria brought our attention to the principles of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness and the importance of country-led planning: "As envisaged in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the suggested joint country/donor M&E processes should explore a shift from retrospective to prospective evaluation, establish closer linkages between evaluation and routine program monitoring, and promote stronger ownership at country level. This will ensure that stakeholders at country level contribute to the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of donor support, and that these activities coherent and complementary."

Ali Coulibaly in Cote D'Ivoire stresses the need for demand-creation**:** "Type of assistance need, must come from the entity we are supposed to help." **Musa in Nigeria** adds**:** "You can exercise ownership when at your level/unit you demand and use data for decision making from where it is generated. Waiting for feedback from a higher level does not encourage ownership."

James in the Philippines reminds us that**:** "M&E practices that seem to work efficiently and effectively are those that are simple, timely, useful, appropriate, and relevant not only to the decision makers but also to those who collect the data and ultimately to the beneficiaries of the programs being monitored and evaluated. To strengthen a country led and owned M&E system, assistance should be geared towards the attainment of the above characteristics."

Velida in Bosnia and Herzegovina challenges us to be open, honest, and learn not just from our successes but also our failures**:** "In my experience people rarely talk about failures, especially in NGO environment. There is an unspoken rule that failure should never be admitted, be it because of donors, or perceived reputational issues of the implementing agency, or simply because of a personal pride. Either way the inability to openly discuss and analyze failures or under-achievements is seriously hampering learning process and breaks the learning cycle that at the end revolves only around achievements or someone else's failure that we cannot properly analyze nor learn from." **Stephen Otieno in Kenya** adds**:** "There is also need for design and facilitation of the necessary interactive learning processes that make critical reflection on performance possible. Finally, we as M&E practitioners (and our organizations) should create a set of norms and valued of trust that makes

transparency of performance and open dialogue about success and failure possible." Velida's and Stephen's posts actually reminded me of a relevant African saying: "***Success has many parents, while failure is an orphan.***"

Dr. Gonzalez in Honduras nicely sums up the menu of capacity building interventions and approaches that are needed: "….Efforts needed to strengthen and institutionalize monitoring and evaluation practices falls within the following: web-based applications with decentralized data entry and real-time access to summary reporting; timely feedback of information to site and district staff; site-level integration of traditionally siloed program area indicators; longitudinal tracking of program and site characteristics; geographic information systems; and use of routinely collected aggregate data for epidemiologic analysis and operations research."

As most of you correctly noted, M&E is not merely a donor tool for keeping watch over a particular project. Indeed, an essential pre-condition for the development of a fully functional M&E system or even a common framework is "demand" from the organizations themselves. It should really be part of an effort to cultivate and seed an organizational culture that is oriented to performance, self-reflection and learning. Organizations must be prepared to invest in this process, and acknowledging that it does take time and effort, and often requiring a change in organizational culture and incentives. Data and information from the system must feed directly into decision-making, while tracking progress for policy and management decisions – and helping you to answer questions such as: Are we achieving our goals and objectives? Are we meeting our deliverables and accountabilities? Where should we channel more resources based on the results so far?

In other words, there should be a process in place to ensure that new learning and innovations that are gained through M&E guide changes in strategic direction and inform the design and implementation of new approaches. That way we are constantly learning and adapting, and ensuring that we have an integrated system in which monitoring is linked to evaluation which is linked to learning. Such a system cannot be developed overnight and providers of capacity building technical assistance in M&E should understand that it takes sustained effort over time to establish a sustainable system.

Tomorrow (Day 5, and last day of the seminar) we shall take some time to reflect on what we have learned this week and how we are going to use it to create an enabling environment for strengthening our M&E systems.