Staff Roles, Organizational Capacity, & Budgeting

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In this lecture, I will talk about some important issues to consider before you launch into the development of your M&E plan, including clarifying staff roles in M&E-related activities and assessing organizational capacity and budgeting for M&E. I will also examine some common roles and responsibilities of M&E and project management staff.

In order for your M&E plan to be successful, it's important that staff engaged with the project are aware of how they will contribute to monitoring and evaluation-related activities. Staff must be clear on their roles and responsibilities in M&E plan development, data collection, assessment of data, and how it is used. Acknowledgement of roles will allow the project manager to assess whether outside support is needed and problem-solve other logistical issues before they become major roadblocks.

Here are some examples of activities an M&E staff member may be responsible for:
- Ensuring overall design of the M&E plan is technically sound;
- Working with stakeholders to develop and refine appropriate outputs, outcomes, indicators, and targets;
- Providing technical assistance to create data collection instruments;
- Helping project staff with data collection (including selection of appropriate methods, sources, enforcement of ethical standards);
- Ensuring data quality systems are established;
- Analyzing data and writing up the findings;
- Aiding project staff to interpret their output and outcome data;
- Promoting use of M&E data to improve project design and implementation; and
- Conducting evaluations or special studies.

Management roles look a bit different. Project managers tend to oversee aspects of M&E and use the data collected in different ways than their staff. Here are some activities project managers may be responsible for:
- Determining what resources, human and financial, should be committed to M&E activities;
- Ensuring content of the M&E plan aligns with the overall vision and direction of the organization/project;
- Assuring data collected meet the information needs of stakeholders;

- Tracking progress to confirm staff carry out activities in the M&E plan;

- Improving project design and implementation based on M&E data;

- Deciding how results will be used and shared;

- Identifying who needs to see and use the data;

- Deciding where to focus evaluation efforts; and

- Interpreting and framing results for different audiences.

The process of developing and implementing your M&E plan should include the stakeholders who will use the information generated from it. Stakeholders may include donors, ministries, local-level stakeholders (district, provincial), and project staff (managers, service providers, M&E). Developing the plan requires detailed knowledge of the project and context, which is provided by the local project team and partners. Their involvement also contributes to better data quality because it reinforces their understanding of indicators, the data they expect to collect, and how those data will be collected. In addition, it helps to ensure that their user needs will be satisfied.

Before you begin to develop your M&E plan, it's useful to assess the technical M&E capacity of your project. In other words, think about the data collection systems that may already exist and the level of skill of your staff in M&E. You may have an M&E team that includes staff trained in data collection and analysis who will lead the development and coordination of the M&E plan. If not, there may be individuals who are motivated and competent and have an interest in M&E who can be strategically tapped for this work. It is essential to identify those people early on, even if they lack formal M&E positions.

Another area that should be considered before creating your M&E plan is project funding. What proportion of resources are going to be devoted to M&E? A common rule of thumb is that approximately 10% of a project's total resources should be slated for M&E. This might include the creation of data collection systems, data analysis software, information dissemination, and M&E coordination. For a new project, it's common for M&E expenditures to be higher in the first year or so due to the need to establish or improve your data collection systems. If your project intends to have external consultants assist with conducting evaluations or developing these systems, this should be factored into your budgeting and decision making.

In summary, I talked about the importance of thinking through key issues prior to developing and implementing your M&E plan. This includes the need to clarify staff roles as they relate to M&E, assess your organization's technical M&E capacity, and ensure sufficient funding is reserved to carry out M&E. I also covered some of the differences between common M&E roles and project management roles.