INTRODUCTION TO MONITORING AND EVALUATION

WHAT IS MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

Monitoring is the continuous assessment of ongoing project activities. The goal of monitoring is to provide the facilitating organization, community members and other stakeholders with detailed information about the progress of an ongoing program. Monitoring relies on regular, consistent collection of data related to facilitators' fieldwork in communities. Consistent data collection helps facilitators understand what is going well, what challenges remain, and how they can work more efficiently. Most importantly, analysis of this data helps facilitators to reflect on how they can improve their strategies, then make necessary changes to the community land protection process.

Evaluation is the process of systematically collecting objective data, then analyzing it to understand the intervention's impacts and outcomes. Rigorous evaluation of program impacts and outcomes is critical to shaping future work – it helps facilitators understand whether their efforts and energy are actually leading to the desired objectives and goals. Evidence of positive impacts can also be used to promote community land protection efforts, get support from government, raise funds for future fieldwork, and support policy advocacy.

Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can help ensure the success and sustainability of community land protection efforts. Collecting and analyzing data can help facilitating organizations to:

- Manage programming effectively and efficiently;
- Learn from successes and challenges and make improvements in program strategy;
- Assess the impacts of their work; and
- Make planning and reporting easier.

HOW TO USE DATA TO IMPROVE PROGRAM STRATEGY?

Collecting and analyzing data to assess program impacts can help facilitators to determine what strategies are working well and what strategies are failing. For example, if at the end of two years of work in a community, impact data show that community land protection efforts resulted in more accountable local governance and increased community members' management of natural resources, but did not make a difference in protecting women's rights, then facilitators can look at the data critically and make changes to their strategy accordingly. Facilitators can also look at monitoring data and adjust their strategies along the way, while the community is still working to complete the community land protection process. To best use data to improve program strategy, facilitators should:

- **Review program goals and gather data that can help facilitators craft strategies to meet all goals.** Before facilitating organizations begin to analyze program data, they should review program goals and determine how they will measure success. For example, if a facilitating organization has a goal of reducing land disputes, they might decide to assess the effectiveness of a strategy of providing additional mediation training to Community Land Mobilizers before the boundary harmonization process. To assess the impact of this strategy, facilitators could gather data about the boundary harmonization process in several communities whose mobilizers received the extra training, then compare the data to data from communities whose mobilizers did not receive the training.

- **Identify programming challenges, then gather data to help facilitators find solutions.** If the data shows that communities are struggling with specific aspects of the community land protection process, facilitators can use the data to 1) find new ways of working to address the problems; and 2) test whether the new strategies are effective. For example, if community leaders are unwilling to share their power with the new Land Governance Council, facilitators can try out new ways of working with leaders, or new ways of structuring the Land Governance Council, and then gather data to see if there are improvements to leaders' behavior.

HOW TO USE DATA TO ASSESS PROGRAM IMPACTS?

Rigorous M&E efforts help facilitating organizations prove both the positive and negative impacts of their work. While stories of specific outcomes and events are a great way to show impact, it is helpful to gather data on how a situation was before the work began, then compare it to how a situation is after the work ended. Many organizations make the mistake of not gathering data before program activities are carried out – but without a hard look at the pre-existing situation (and data to prove it), it is not possible to prove whether the work done made a difference or not. For example, facilitators may know from personal observation that as a direct result of the land protection process, the community was able to resolve a number of longstanding land conflicts with neighbors. However, if they do not have data to prove this impact (such as the number of pre-existing land conflicts, as compared to the number of land conflicts remaining after the conclusion of the process), the success may be difficult to prove. To best use data to assess program impacts, facilitators should:

- **Determine how to measure success and develop a clear set of "indicators."** To assess the impacts of community land protection efforts, facilitating organizations must develop specific, clear "indicators" of success. Indicators are used to determine whether a program is achieving its objectives and goals. Facilitators must decide what indicators they will track before beginning community land protection activities (so that they can collect "before" and "after" data, then compare the "before" data against the "after" data to understand the impacts of their work). While Namati has identified key indicators that facilitating organizations can use to assess program impacts, each facilitating organization may want to create additional indicators specific to their own contexts and goals. (See the box on indicators in the chapter on *Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation*.)

- **Figure out what questions to ask to gather data on the indicators.** Each indicator or measure of success will require asking its own specific questions. Facilitators should carefully think about what questions to ask to help track whether they are achieving results for each indicator. For example, if facilitators want to find out if the program had a positive impact on bringing diversity to community land governance, they can ask questions about whether youth, members of minority groups, and women were elected to the Land Governance Council. Such questions could include: "Before the program began, how many women held positions on land governance bodies? After the program ended, how many women were serving on the Land Governance Council?" Questions like this are factual and create objective data that can help answer questions about impact.

- **Collect data** through baseline and endline focus group discussions and key informant interviews, and also by answering specific impact assessment questions after completing each community land protection activity. (See the chapters on *Collecting Baseline and Endline Data* and *Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation* for more details.)

- **Organize, compare and interpret the data:** As they are collecting data, facilitators should make sure the data is organized in a way that will help them to identify trends and changes over time. Facilitators should carefully review each community's baseline data to help them go into the community "with their eyes open," fully aware of the community's specific situation. Then, as new data is collected along the course of community land protection activities, facilitators should look at the data every month to analyze impacts that are emerging along the way. Finally, once the endline data has been collected, facilitators should compare the baseline data against the endline data to see if there were changes as a result of program activities.

- **Come to conclusions:** After comparing the data, facilitators may be able to come to conclusions and/or assess progress on each indicator. These conclusions can often be very powerful advocacy tools, as they are based on sound analysis of factual data rather than simple observation.

HOW CAN FACILITATING ORGANIZATIONS ENSURE THAT THEY COLLECT AND ANALYZE HIGH QUALITY DATA?

Collecting and analyzing data is not an easy task and requires a major commitment by the facilitating organization's management and staff of facilitating organizations. To best support facilitators to comprehensively monitor and evaluate their work, an organization should:

- **Make data collection and analysis an organizational priority.** Facilitating organizations should create a work culture in which facilitators carefully observe how the work is going, reflect on trends, and work to improve program impacts. Facilitators should be granted time in their schedules to complete all M&E forms and engage in regular reflection about each community's progress and setbacks, as well as any trends they see happening across a number of communities. Such analysis can help facilitators adapt the community land protection approach to best suit the local context and culture.
- **Appoint a specific "M&E point person."** Experience has shown that facilitating organizations collect much better data when they appoint a single person to review, oversee and supervise M&E efforts. Facilitating organizations do not need a special "M&E officer" to do this – any staff member that is interested and committed to M&E can serve this function. The M&E point person should review all data entered, make sure it is correct and accurate, and seek more information from facilitators if key details are missing.
- **Schedule regular "debriefing meetings" after field visits.** One easy way for facilitators to reflect on their work and make time to complete all M&E responsibilities is to schedule short "debriefing conversations" ***after every field visit***. During these debriefing meetings, facilitators can discuss what happened during the visit, reflect on challenges and successes, and create strategies to address issues that arise. At the end of the debriefing meeting, facilitators should be given time to record their observations and reflections in the appropriate M&E tool.
- **Schedule monthly data analysis and reflection meetings.** Facilitating organizations should hold a meeting every month to review all data collected in the previous month, analyze it, identify common challenges and successes, and discuss any necessary changes to program strategy. Organizations may also choose to revise their work plans based on the monthly data analysis.

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