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Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results
ANGLOPHONE AFRICA

CLEAR-AA LEARNING NOTE

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YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU'RE NOT MEASURING

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE M&E SYSTEMS CAPACITY STRENGTHENING IN AFRICA

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ABOUT CLEAR-AA

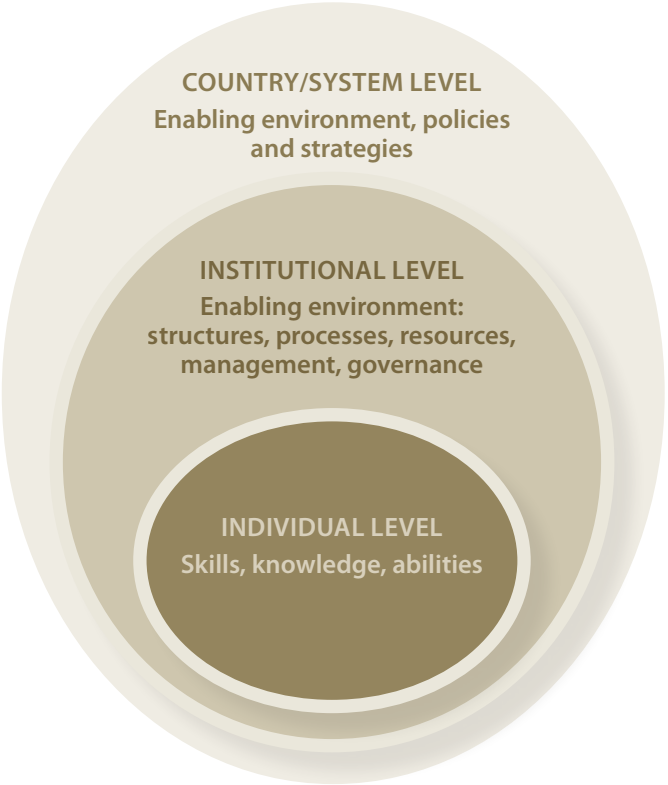
The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is one of six regional centres housed in academic institutions across the globe with the purpose of building the capacity of countries, people and institutions to plan, measure and report on development programmes – a process referred to as monitoring and evaluation (M&E). CLEAR-AA's work in supporting and improving M&E contributes to better governance and improved development outcomes across Africa.

M&E capacity has moved to centre stage in development endeavours and substantial sums are being invested in capacity strengthening programmes. But in Africa these programmes are demonstrably less effective than we would like them to be. Why? One reason is that they are are designed and managed on the basis of untested, unrealistic assumptions. Diagnostic or situation analyses and needs assessments are not being done. And, crucially, M&E systems capacity strengthening programmes are not being measured for performance.

M&E system capacity strengthening is a process-driven activity. Collecting and analysing evidence and measuring results enables implementers to improve their programmes and interventions. Further, measuring the effectiveness of capacity strengthening efforts also alerts policymakers, practitioners and funders to the real needs of a country's M&E system.

M&E systems capacity strengthening is the process through which individuals, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their M&E systems to effectively monitor and evaluate development performance by the state and by state and non-state institutions.

3 LEVELS OF M&E CAPACITY



CURRENT MEASUREMENT PRACTICES IN AFRICAN M&E SYSTEMS CAPACITY STRENGTHENING INTERVENTIONS

A 2019 CLEAR-AA study (CLEAR-AA, 2020) on M&E capacity strengthening in 8 African countries shows the following:

Short-term, individualised interventions

Interventions to strengthen M&E capacity in Africa are primarily undertaken by external donors. They are short term and designed to capacitate implementers of specific development programmes with a specific lifespan. Thus, resources for measuring the effectiveness of the interventions are only available for a limited time, making it difficult to measure long-term outcomes and impacts.

Excluded from the development cycle

M&E capacity strengthening activities are viewed as peripheral to the development cycle as a whole, not worth evaluating or reporting on at the end of the cycle. Interventions are designed ad hoc and do not get enough funding, including for measuring their effectiveness. This is the case in both state and non-state institutions.

Lack of plans

A common mistake is that African countries do not have M&E capacity strengthening plans. Where there are plans, they are not informed by a scientific M&E capacity assessment.

Focused at the individual level

Capacity strengthening interventions are focused on strengthening individual rather than institutional capacity. Very few interventions are targeted at strengthening a country's M&E system.

Tracking process instead of effectiveness

Where the performance of M&E systems capacity strengthening is being measured, the focus is on short-term process indicators, such as the quality of training materials and facilitators, rather than on the impact of the intervention on abilities, knowledge and skills. Measures of effectiveness, such as outcome and impact indicators, which need a longer measuring period, are not being used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A systematic approach to M&E systems capacity strengthening will help countries measure performance and effectiveness.

1. Needs assessment

An M&E capacity needs assessment systematically identifies and addresses the gaps between current conditions and what is desired.

2. Plan

An M&E system capacity development plan must address the needs identified in the assessment.

7 elements of a good plan

- Clear
- Practical
- Timeline
- Objectives
- Activities
- Measurable indicators
- Budget

3. Resources

Forward-thinking and resources are required from a country for implementing activities, measuring progress and measuring the long-term outcomes of M&E capacity strengthening.

4. Advocacy

Champions identified by implementers and a country's government can advocate for measuring the performance of M&E system capacity strengthening interventions: You can't manage what you're not measuring.

FIND OUT MORE

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THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE LEARNING NOTE ARE THAT OF THE AUTHOR

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