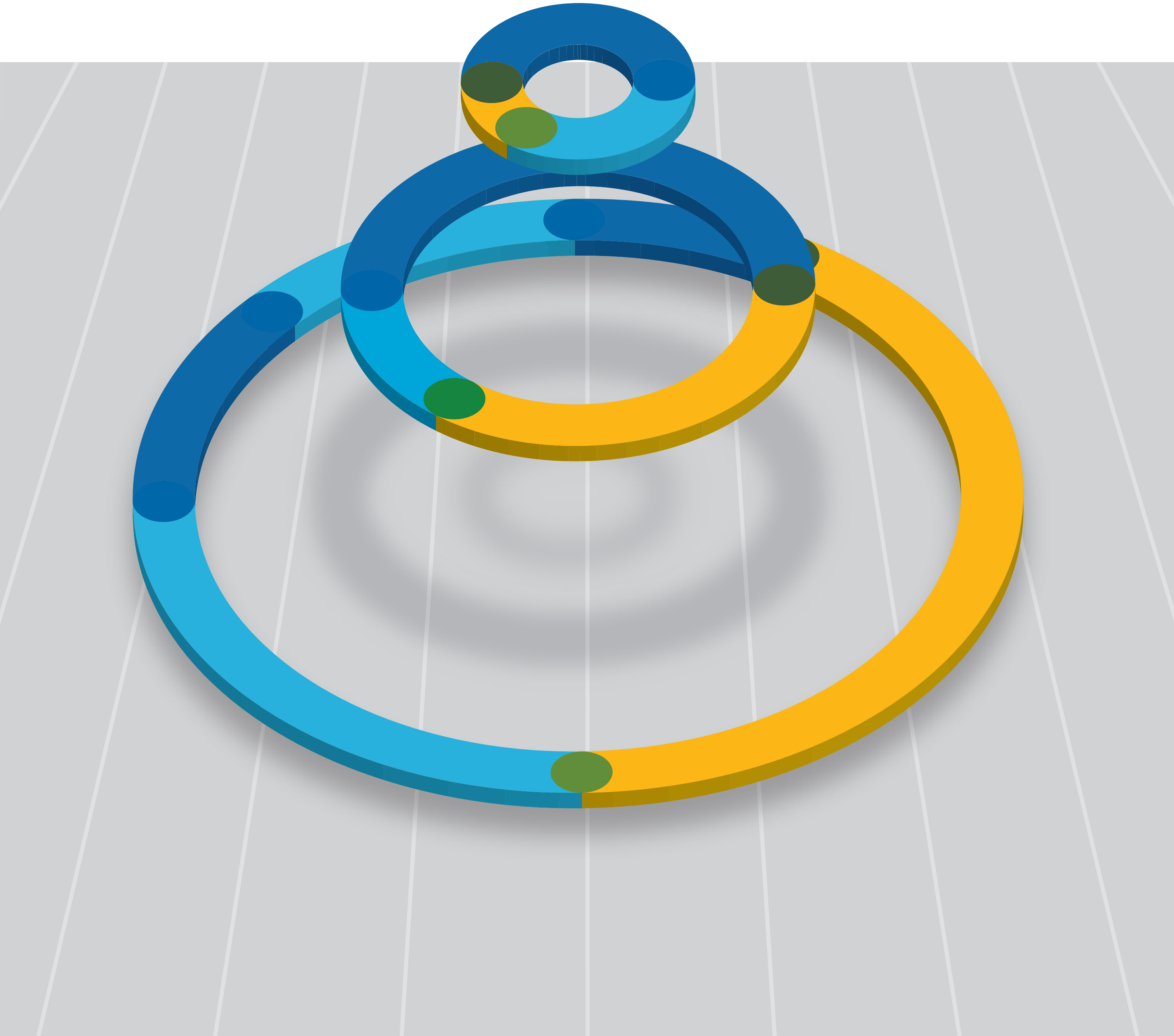
Capacity and Institution Building
Working Group

Policy Recommendations

Measuring Capacity development of Local Governments and their Associations



Coordinated by the UCLG Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group

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ACRONYMS

ACB	Association Capacity Building
CD	Capacity Development
CIB	Capacity and Institution Building
DFATD	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Canada)
EU	European Union
FCM	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
LGCP	Local Government Capacity Programme
LF	Logical Framework
LFM	Logical Framework Matrix
LG	Local Government
LGA	Local Government Association
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSC	Most Significant Change
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OM	Outcome Mapping
OCAT	Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool
RBF	Results Based Framework
RBM	Results Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
VNG International	International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)
VVSG	Association of Flemish Cities and Muniicpalities
WB	World Bank

FOREWORD

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), in its role as the global organisation representing the interests of local government and their associations, has brought together local government associations (LGAs), cities and regional authorities to foster collaboration and a common understanding of development cooperation among members and partners.

Within UCLG, the Working Group on Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) of UCLG acts as a technical platform bringing together professionals from LGAs and individual local governments active in the field of capacity development and local government development cooperation. The overarching goal of the platform is to build a pool of knowledge and exchange around the most effective methodologies of capacity building and to, ultimately gain more attention and recognition for LG development cooperation, within and outside of UCLG.

Considering the current quest for results in development, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has become an increasingly important topic in the work of UCLG CIB Working Group. The present policy recommendations reflect the position of the UCLG CIB members and summarises the findings of a survey conducted amongst CIB members in October-December 2015 around their M&E approaches and practices. The paper aims to highlight the specificities of M&E of capacity development (CD) initiatives undertaken by and with local governments (LGs) and to identify ways in which M&E can be most successfully used in this specific context.

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1. Introduction

1.1. WHY M&E MATTERS

Since the 1980s, local governments and their associations have increased and enhanced their international development cooperation activities. Today, local governments worldwide are involved in many forms of cooperation and partnership, spanning a wide range of motives and objectives. Within the different forms of partnership and cooperation, the strengthening of local governments capacities, and of their associations, to allow them to play a leadership role in the social and economic development of their community, plays an increasingly important role. Local governments and their associations have unique skills, responsibilities and resources, with which they can contribute to the ultimate goal of fighting poverty and enhancing social and economic inclusion.

International arrangements such as the Paris Declaration (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership (2011) all emphasise the importance of a results-based approach to development that focuses on performance and achievements. Particularly in times of economic and financial crisis, donors, but also citizens in general, aspire to see concrete results in exchange of their financial and development support. As a result, last years have seen a rise in donors' results-based frameworks (e.g. DFTAD, EU, UNDP, NORAD, USAID; etc.) and increasing pressure is put today on development actors, including local governments and their associations, to streamline and update their Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems, in an effort to show results.

M&E systems are thus also becoming essential components of LGs international cooperation project and programme management, from design and planning to final evaluation and reporting. They are also important tools, serving both accountability and learning purposes, as well as informing policy choices and contributing to better communication of development results.

Why M&E is important to LGs and their associations[1]

1. **Accountability** for the use of resources. It is often seen as the most important reason, as projects and programmes aim to solve identified problems and/or respond to concrete questions from certain groups. Accountability works in several directions: both horizontally (i.e. to the left and right, towards other departments in the local government and partners, including partner municipalities and civil society) and vertically (i.e. upward towards the donors funding the project and downwards, towards citizens and local groups),

2. **Improve implementation and inform policy choices.** Monitoring and evaluation demonstrate how the resources are being used and allow to quickly detect any real or potential problems the project may encounter. Besides, they serve to information that can be used for decisions about the direction of the project in the future and/or to inform decisions on future projects.

1 Adapted from VVSG (2013)

3. **Institutional learning.** Monitoring and evaluation can also teach some interesting lessons, which can be applied to current projects or new projects in order to repeat the achieved successes/avoid failures/introduce improvements/etc. However, learning requires adequate planning and organisation.

4. **Communication.** Monitoring and evaluation can also contribute to the communication between the different project agents and stakeholders, as they encourage them to share their thoughts and perception of the project's results. People who are not immediately involved in the projects also benefit from good monitoring and evaluation (i.e. they can understand better the project, its achievements and general context).

1.2. M&E OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

Capacity development has become a rallying cry[2] among donors and aid practitioners. It is often seen as the missing link in development, as a primary objective of development assistance, and a pre-condition to achieve sustainable development impact. Yet, bringing capacity (and institutional) development to the forefront of development cooperation has proved to be more complex than expected, considering the elusive nature of the concept and the difficulty to visualize and measure capacity development[3]. Besides, experience proves that capacity cannot be imported as a turnkey operation. Instead, it must be developed from within, with key actors fully involved (i.e. in the driving seat) as well as donors and experts acting as catalysts, facilitators, and brokers of knowledge and techniques. Additionally, the concept has evolved over time, alongside development paradigms.

Nowadays, the concept of CD is all encompassing. The focus is not only on developing the capacities of individuals, but also on strengthening the capacities of institutions to perform, in order to be able to achieve a set of common objectives. The environment in which institutions operate is also becoming increasingly important. Human resources, skills, institutional setting, organisational culture, aspirations and strategies, but also political considerations, are all interlinked elements, which need to be understood to assess capacity needs and define the capacity development processes. This fully applies to LGs and their associations, for which capacity development is a perpetual need and a legitimate end in itself[4]. Growing urbanization, climate change and its effects, enhanced decentralization of powers, people's changing demands and evolving, and even changing, socioeconomic developments, all prompt LGs to revisit periodically their capacities.

When it comes to M&E of CD, a growing consensus exists on the need for tailored approaches, considering the complex and long-term perspective that underpins CD interventions as well as their focus on systemic change, as opposed to quick wins that can result from, for example, infrastructural programs. Echoing this acknowledgment, the past years have seen a rise in the use of innovative approaches, often developed to complement traditional methods like the Logical Framework, in order to better capture and document change, and enhance engagement with partners.

This trend is also evident in LGs CD efforts. According to a comparative study conducted during the last quarter of 2015[5], most LGs and LGAs use a combination of M&E **approaches and tools.** Even though

2 ECDPM (2004)

3 VNG International (2015)

4 idem

5 UCLG/CIB (2015)

logical frameworks and results-based frameworks remain the most widespread approaches in accordance to donor requirement[6], **tailored capacity M&E tools** -such as the 5Cs and organisational capacity assessment tools- **or new M&E approaches and tools** -including theories of change (ToC), outcome mapping (OM), most significant change (MSC), etc.- **are increasingly being used**.

The reason for the use of such mix and the (dis)advantages, will be further detailed in the next sections.

2. Brief state of play of M&E of CD interventions undertaken by LGs and their associations

Despite the importance attached to M&E, LGs and their associations are confronted with significant challenges to develop effective M&E systems. Based on the findings of the 2015 comparative study, these include the lack of permanent qualified staff, insufficient M&E and skills, **constrictive donor requirements** and even competing requests (i.e. upwards accountability to donors vs. institutional learning). For partner LGs and LGAs it can be very demanding to have their own systems of monitoring and evaluation for the implementation of their policies, and having other systems for each of the donors or partners that they work with, increasing thus immensely the burden on the staff.

According to the afore-mentioned study, l**ess than 30% of the institutions have permanent M&E and knowledge management staff in their institutions**. With regard to donor requirements, reportedly few of them use **tailored capacity development tools** and/or experiment with new approaches and tools, therefore allowing for greater flexibility in the use of LF and performance management frameworks.

Another relevant finding of the study is that **there is no blueprint or one best tool or approach** to plan, monitor and evaluate CD efforts undertaken by local and regional governments, as well as their associations. Given the complexity and the multi-dimensional aspects of LGs' CD interventions, their planning, monitoring and evaluation advocate for a **combination of approaches and tools to define complex adaptive systems and approaches**.

The key question is therefore that of **identifying the best-suited approaches and tools** to be used **at each stage** of the project/programme cycle, as well as **finding the right balance of approaches and tools.** There are sufficient approaches, methodologies and tools to enable local governments and their associations to develop their own adaptive systems and approaches in order to implement CD in their development cooperation programmes in an effective way. The challenges are to i) ensure that these are in line with the donors requirements and ii) to use these approaches and tools in the most effective manner according to the context and in line with existing monitoring frameworks at the local level,

6 80% of the LGs and LGAs surveyed report working with donors that require the application of the LF approach

which requires **understanding the specific characteristics, stipulations and limitations** of each approach and tool in order to build an actor- and context-adapted system to implement CD initiatives[7].

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Logical Framework	The **logical framework (LF) remains the most preferred and often required approaches by donors as well as one of the best-known tools** by LGs. When placed in a results-based framework based on a sound problem analysis (it is important to stress that the LF goes far beyond the schematic overview of it), LF can provide relevant, useful and straightforward information (including on the hierarchy of results), sufficient for monitoring and internal evaluation.	The LF lacks focus on the process and on the actors (e.g. actors are only assessed as stakeholders in the design phase, but not linked to the results chain) and starts from problems rather than assets and opportunities. Besides, it builds on the reductionist assumption that change and hence capacity development are a "lineal process" (i.e. according to the LFM, development interventions introduce incentives for change which, assumptions permitting, lead to development outcomes), which tends to overlook the influence of formal and informal institutions, power relations and/or organisational culture. The LF is often used too rigidly (i.e. problems are defined at the formulation stage, solutions to these problems are posed as pre-determined outcomes and the indicators are set as benchmarks to monitor progress in relation to the established objectives over time) and assumptions and hypothesis are hardly ever reviewed during the implementation of the programme.
Theory of Change	**Theory of Change*** (ToC) emerged to address several of the challenges and shortcomings linked to the LF. It focuses on the results chain by **mapping out** what has been described as **the "missing middle" between what a program does** (i.e. its activities or interventions) and **how these lead to desired goals being achieved**. ToC emphasises the 'way of thinking' about how a programme is expected to work, rather than what is expected from it. At its heart are hypotheses about how change will happen, which require details of all the intermediate steps. Therefore, **assumptions** underlying the internal logic or causality chain are very relevant and need to be assessed and tested. ToC prompts critical reflection and even rethinking if required. It can be very useful during the design and planning phase of CD interventions,	ToC is more a philosophy or an approach rather than a tool. To preserve its flexibility, it doesn't come with formalised tools or standardised formats. It cannot be used as a standalone M&E approach, but rather as a "strategy" to prompt critical thinking and reflection around the change process. It requires adequate skills and often-external facilitation.

7 The table that follows provides a quick overview of the different approaches and tools. Other tools used for M&E, such as client satisfaction surveys, case studies, etc designed to gather information are not described here. For more information please consult the comparative study

* http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Outcome mapping (OM)	Like ToC, OM focuses on change and social transformation. Developed to ensure participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions, it focuses on outcomes (defined as behavioural changes) rather than impact. OM seeks to help the programme learn about its influence on the progression of change in their direct partners, and therefore helps those in the assessment process think more systematically and pragmatically about what they are doing and to adaptively manage variations in strategies to bring about desired outcomes. All in all, OM **is an actor-based approach, which puts people and learning at the centre of the intervention.** It recognises the complexity of change processes (i.e. change in attitude, mentality capacity) and takes into account the fact that "boundary partners" (suing OM terminology) are ultimately responsible for achieving change	OM is not yet widely used by donors. Also, it was designed as a stand-alone tool to plan, monitor and evaluation development interventions. However it is mostly used at the planning and design stages of the intervention in complement to other tools (e.g. the LF). Finally, it can be complicated to apply (particular as an evaluation tool), requiring external facilitators who need to be well acquainted with the technique (i.e. "so called OM experts").
Most Significant Change (MSC)	Most Significant Change (MSC) is a powerful **qualitative participatory monitoring and evaluation tool** seeking to explain 'how', 'in which situations and contexts' and 'under which conditions' (enabling environment) change can and does happen. The tool, which can be used throughout the program cycle to provide regular information to programme managers and assessors, involves collecting information based on 'significant change' stories from the field level and therefore information on specific impacts and outcomes. MSC is often described as an alternative to RBM (i.e. the monitoring tool used within the LF approach). It is participatory because stakeholders and project staff are involved from the beginning of the process, as well as in identifying project impact. MSC is often recommended for interventions **where change is not possible to predict beforehand,** where it is difficult to set pre-defined indicators, and where changes are qualitative and not susceptible to statistical treatment	The methodology can be time and resource consuming (considering the level of involvement required from the key stakeholders inside the institution) when applied to local governments. Besides it is often "criticised" for not being objective, being "anecdotal" and therefore not offering a solid base for monitoring particularly when monitoring serves mainly accountability purposes (i.e. to answer to donor demands). All in all, MSC is hardly ever used as a standalone tool. Rather it is perceived as a complement to other tools, which offers the advantage of providing, through a highly participatory process, relevant qualitative information in the process of strengthening local governments, which indicators and technocratic M&E approaches fail to capture.

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Organisational assessment tools (OCAT, 5cs, etc)	5Cs, the Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) and other related capacity assessment tools are **powerful participatory (i.e. allowing for self-assessment) tools to assess institutions and organisations' capacities** and plan and regularly assess capacity development initiatives. When applied at design level, they can provide a snapshot of the capacity needs of the organisation. At the planning level, they can be a very useful framework for assessing capacities since they highlights which capabilities need to be developed in order to realize the organisation/institution's objectives. They can also be applied to the monitoring and evaluation of capacity development projects, since they enable users to define a baseline for evaluating changes in capacity and performance over time. They can therefore be used in results based frameworks, as well as to trigger dialogue with stakeholders on improving capacity development.	These tools do not necessarily explore and show how any improved capacity contributes towards improved performance, or the causes that have contributed to any improvement (i.e. the attribution question). What's more capacity assessment tools may require **a high level of engagement from a critical mass of stakeholders**. As a result they may be complex and time and resource consuming.

3. M&E stages and tools: emerging lessons and practices

3.1. PLANNING

Based on the comparative study and practice by LGs it can be concluded that the **Logical Framework, when used in a Results Based Framework**, based on a sound assessment and used in a flexible manner (all these are sine qua non conditions) can be a sound methodology for **planning**, and it is often (if not always) the methodology required by donors. Yet, considering its limitations and risks that linear planning entails, the LF needs to be combined with other tools and techniques, which address the aspects neglected or not sufficiently taken on board (i.e. the process dimension, "the so-called "missing middle", etc.) In this regard, for the planning of a project or programme, the **Theory of Change** can be a powerful and complementary tool to analyse and map stakeholders' ideas and relationships, understand how change should happen and, in turn, identify potential risks that might hamper or support project/programme implementation. **Outcome Mapping** (which is also a powerful evaluation tool) offers a sound added as a complementary actor-mapping technique, to identify the so-called boundary partners, and work with them to elaborate on the progress markers through which progress can be measured.

Other capacity assessment tools, such as the **5Cs Model** adapted by VNG International **or the LGA assessment framework,** created by VNG International to work with LGAs and further adapted by FCM, could also be used in combination with the LF (if required) and even with the ToC. Indeed, organisational capacity assessment frameworks can be very powerful for assessing and taking stock of the institutions' and organisations' capacities and can help define appropriate indicators and monitoring frameworks. A number of LGs seem to be working in this direction, using LF in combination with specific capacity development tools and even OM at the planning level. The overriding idea appears to be that of: (i) gaining a deep understanding of the "departure point" (i.e. where the institution is standing before the intervention) and portraying the logic of change pursued by the programme, while (ii) answering accountability demands, often put forward by donors.

3.2.MONITORING

At **monitoring level**, in addition to the LF indicators (which continue to be the preferred tools used At **monitoring level**, in addition to the LF indicators (which continue to be the preferred tools used by donors) and other quantitative tools regularly used by LGs and their associations (such as client satisfaction surveys, case studies, etc.), **ToC** can be a powerful tool to address the issue of the 'missing middle', by providing information that explains the process of change.

Also, as afore mentioned, **tailored capacity assessment tools** –including the 5Cs model and the LGA assessment framework – provide a sound basis for regularly monitoring and therefore taking stock of capacity development progress. They are however as standalone tools insufficient to explain how change has happened.

To address this (as during the planning phase) a **powerful combination** for **effective monitoring** is that of using the **RBF** (not necessarily the LF) and/or tailored capacity assessment tools in combination with **MSC or OM**, as the latter focus more on the process as well as on the actors. Besides, as briefly evoked, MSC and OM can be used as powerful engagement tools to trigger discussion and exchanges across all relevant stakeholders, involved in CD efforts. A number of LGs and their associations (such as VVSG) are increasingly taking this direction, in an effort to improve the quality and "substance" of their monitoring and reporting.

3.3. EVALUATION

Finally at evaluation level, evidence shows that a **combination of approaches** (including RBF and ToC) **as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative tools can be highly beneficial** for building up a picture over time of how capacity development change has happened.

The use of participatory tools, such as MSC, OM and **peer evaluations** (whereby other LGs and/or LGAs are involved to evaluate their peers), can also have a great potential to enhance the learning dimension of the evaluation exercise.

4. Key messages and recommendations

4.1. TO LGS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

Building on the above, a number of areas emerge as priorities to improve LGs and LGAs M&E systems for capacity development. These are:

- **Be clear about the purpose of capacity development and that of M&E**. LGs and their associations engaged in capacity development efforts need to have a clear, stated rationale for carrying out capacity development, and a clear idea of what they want to achieve, both in the medium and long-term. Ideally, this should mean developing an appropriate Theory of Change (ToC) or, at the least developing clear, agreed statements about how improved capacity at different levels should contribute to better performance and wider development goals. The purpose of the M&E framework should also be clear (i.e. whether it is designed for accountability to donors and supporters and/or to learn and improve). The purpose(s) for which M&E is carried out will have a large degree of influence over the types of approaches and methodologies used[8].

8 INTRAC (2010)

- **Use a sensible and smart mix of M&E approaches, methodologies and tools** that will help provide a picture of what is changing (or not) and why. Where resources permit, findings should be triangulated by involving different stakeholders in the M&E process.

- **Aim for simplicity and efficiency, and be realistic in your expectations.** M&E remains a complex issue. Efforts should be geared towards keeping M&E efforts proportionate to the programme (size and resource-wise), well aligned to partners' institutional M&E frameworks (when they exist) and, to the maximum extent possible, simple and straight-forward[9] (i.e. collecting information that really matters and can be used) to avoid making matters unnecessarily complicated or cumbersome for the institution. Ideally, the institution should be able to perform as much of the monitoring and evaluation itself with its partners (except for external evaluations, when required) and investment in time and money should remain reasonable. Also, LGs and their associations should **be realistic in their expectations towards measuring change**. Evidence shows that M&E is often put under serious strain when capacity development promoters attempt to prove they have achieved unrealistic expectations spelled out in logical frameworks. In particular, LGs and their associations should remain cautious about predicting the pace of change within institutions they may influence (the so-called boundary partners using OM terminology) but over which they have no absolute control.

- **When a donor is involved** (i.e. for externally funded programmes), key issues should be agreed beforehand. This might include coming to an agreement about how far M&E should go in terms of measurement, and at what levels[10]. It might also involve agreeing the specific blend of qualitative and quantitative information required. Wherever possible, agreements should be recorded to reduce the risks of changing demands when staff changes, as it is often the case with donors but also with LG (due to electoral cycles). Also, it is recommendable to discuss with the donors that the requirements of measurement be aligned with the own reporting mechanisms of the partner LGs and LGAs themselves, to avoid extra burden on the partner.

- **Make of M&E a participatory and collective learning exercise to the maximum extent possible**. Throughout the process of M&E, relevant stakeholders within the institution (both at technical and political level) but also external to the institution (e.g. users of public services, general citizens, etc) should be able to share their opinions, views and perceptions around the programme (i.e. activities and results)[11]. This gives them the opportunity to affect monitoring and evaluation, even at the level of "what should be monitored" (i.e. according to them, what is relevant and which data should be collected?). Also, special attention should be paid to diversity when involving actors and gathering data, as men and women, older and younger people and/or different backgrounds and ethnic groups experiences change differently.

- **Enhance exchanges with other LGs and LGAs on their experiences and approaches on M&E within the CIB Working Group,** particularly with those more advanced in experimenting different approaches and tools, in an effort to build on their efforts and avoid "reinventing the wheel".

9 VVSG (2013)

10 Intrac (2010)

11 VVSG (2013)

4.2. TO DONORS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

To achieve higher quality and more consistent M&E, the following recommendations can be made to donors and the international community:

- **Ensure the development and implementation of flexible results-based frameworks**, which account for LGs CD efforts' specificities, which are to be reflected in their M&E systems (hence going beyond the LF) and;

- **Align reporting mechanisms** to the already existing frameworks of LGs and LGAs to avoid extra burden in terms of reporting on the partner.

- **Introduce adequate incentives** (e.g. ear-marked funds for learning in the funded programmes, etc) to LGs, LGAs and even capacity development providers that are willing to invest seriously in M&E for learning purposes in order to improve performance both within their own institutions and more generally across the capacity development community working with LGs and LGAs.

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