GSDRC Governance and Social Development Resource Centre

Helpdesk Research Report: Participatory M&E and Beneficiary Feedback
Date: 03.09.2010

Query: Please identify the existing literature on participatory monitoring and evaluation, with a particular emphasis on gaining wide-ranging beneficiary feedback. Comment on the coverage, scalability, risks, benefits and applicability.

Enquirer: Aid Effectiveness Team, DFID

Contents

1. Overview

PM&E

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is a general term that refers to a wide range of methods 'where primary stakeholders…are active participants, [taking] the lead in tracking and making sense of progress towards achievement of…results at the local level, and drawing actionable conclusions'. (Hilhorst and Guijt 2006: 4). Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) approaches can be traced back to various participatory methodologies from the 1970s and were boosted by the rise of the 'good governance' agenda in the 1990s (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE have led the way in developing PM&E tools for use in community programmes and most major donors have been experimenting with PM&E approaches since the 1980s. Almost all development organisations now include some form of participation in their programmes (Jacobs et al 2010). Although PM&E approaches have been widely promoted by civil society organisations, Jacobs (2010) has argued that 'it is striking that these mechanisms have not been widely applied within development agencies'.

Hilhorst and Gujit (2006) have argued that a PM&E process can enhance efficiency and effectiveness of governance projects, improve the exercise of power (i.e. increase openness, transparency and accountability), enhance the equity of outcomes and increase stakeholder interactions. The literature also highlights several challenges that have held back the practical application of PM&E approaches. Chambers (2007) identifies organisational conservatism as an important barrier to the implementation and adoption of PM&E methods. Vernooy et al (2006) argue that it is difficult to establish sustainable PM&E mechanisms and highlight difficulties of building PM&E onto existing community structures and integrating them into local governance structures and political processes. Jacobs (2005) identifies some risks associated with increasing financial transparency: he argues that it may increase tension between agencies, government and other interest groups. He also states that these risks are likely to be particular acute in conflict situations or in the early stages of an emergency response.

Pratt and Myhrman's (2009) survey of NGO and CSO accountability mechanisms argues that while most current initiatives are not methodologically new, there has been a recent drive towards producing 'hands-on' tools that are easy to use. They argue that these tools have tended to stifle 'discussion with and involvement of stakeholders and analysis of what the accountability concept actually entails' (Pratt and Myhrman 2009, 12).

Beneficiary feedback

A beneficiary feedback system is a 'systematic approach to collecting the views of…key stakeholders about the quality and impact of work undertaken by a development agency, generating quantitative data' (Jacobs 2010). Increasing beneficiary feedback has been identified as a critical tool in improving the impact, effectiveness and accountability of development projects (Hilhorst and Gujit 2006, Chambers 2007, Jacobs 2010); and in reforming the wider aid system (Barder 2010). These mechanisms have been supported by many donors. ADB (2007), for example, recently recommended that providers should be evaluated based on beneficiary feedback, and beneficiaries should be able to choose between a number of providers. As with PM&E approaches, however, there are questions regarding the extent to which rhetorical commitment to participation and feedback is reflect in practice. The Listening Project (a long-term programme designed to collect wide-ranging experiences of aid beneficiaries from around the world) found that most donors and NGOs do not spend much time 'listening to local people's perspectives or reflecting on the impacts of their work, much less the cumulative effects of their and others' interventions' (Brown 2010).

There is evidence to suggest that beneficiary feedback mechanisms can improve impact (Jacobs 2010, Björkman and Svensson 2009, Brown 2010), enhance local ownership (Jacobs et al 2010) and prove more cost-effective than other forms of M&E (Björkman and Svensson 2009). The Listening Project concluded that beneficiaries of aid felt that aid agencies should '"invest the necessary time", "go more slowly", and "listen to people" in order to "learn about the real circumstances", "get to know people", and "show respect for people's ideas and opinions"' (Brown 2010).

The literature identifies a number of risks associated with beneficiary feedback. Beneficiary feedback mechanisms may become dominated by powerful groups, be unable to reach the most marginalised groups, and end up generating responses that are unrepresentative. Women are particularly likely to be excluded (Jacobs 2010, Jacobs et al 2010). There are a number of practical problems associated with collecting feedback from the most marginalised, which require more careful planning and closer facilitation (Jacobs 2010). There has been a lack of rigorous evaluation of the wider impact of these approaches. The benefits of PM&E techniques and beneficiary feedback mechanisms remain 'largely unproven' (Jacobs comments). Pratt and Myhrman (2009) argue that there is a danger that beneficiary feedback may replace participation as a goal, and be regarded as sufficient. They argue that these approaches may be 'attractive to new corporate based donors and those looking for a simple system which can illustrate that these issues have been dealt with in the letter if not the spirit of real accountability' (p.7).

New Technologies

The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in PM&E may offer one way of scaling up the implementation of these techniques, and overcoming some of the existing barriers to implementation. In recent years, SMS and internet-based systems have been developed to collect beneficiary feedback. Examples include Frontline SMS, Ushahidi, Map Kibera, eMoksha and Daraja (see section four for more details). Since these approaches are relatively new, there are very few studies that evaluate their impact or cost-effectiveness. One exception is a recent study of a pilot community feedback project by GlobalGiving. Stories and feedback about NGOs and their activities were collected by paper, with the support of NGOs and community members. In future, these stories will be displayed online to provide a tool to NGOs working in the country.[1] The draft evaluation report found that the cost of collecting 3,000 stories about 'community efforts' in Kenya was around $1,500, with 6 months of training and technology costing $20,000. It found that these beneficiary insights could not be replicated or predicted by outsiders and evaluation experts, implying that there is 'no substitute for local perspectives'. It also suggested that this project was cost-effective and relatively quick to implement (3,000 stories were

[1] See a demonstration site here: http://www.globalgivingcommunity.com/kenya/.

collected in two months), after the initial facilitation period. The draft report was positive about the opportunities for scaling-up.

Although there are a number of recent examples of the use of new technologies and social media to facilitate participatory monitoring and evaluation, evidence suggests that they are unlikely to provide a ‘magic bullet’ to facilitating beneficiary feedback (Hudson comments). The use of technology may provide a means of overcoming some of the practical barriers and costs of applying PM&E. They may offer a means of reaching a wider pool of beneficiaries more quickly, and communicating their views more effectively. Nevertheless, Jacobs (2010) argues that hearing from the most excluded will still take time, resources and careful facilitation. Organisational incentives that privilege upward accountability will still remain difficult to overcome. The core barrier continues to be a political one (relating to incentives) and not a technical one (Jacobs comments). The importance of tailoring these techniques to context remains and this perhaps implies that these techniques should not be rolled out universally (Jacobs comments). This barrier will also raise costs.

<u>Recommendations</u>

A number of key lessons emerge from the literature on PM&E and beneficiary feedback:

- PM&E and beneficiary feedback approaches can improve effectiveness and sustainability and reduce the costs of monitoring, but these approaches also carry risks. These include generating unrepresentative results and increasing tensions between stakeholders.
- PM&E should be understood as social and political processes (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). The primary barriers to PM&E and beneficiary feedback mechanisms are therefore political (relating to incentives, organisational culture and power relations), not technical (Jacobs comments, Chambers 2007, Hilhorst and Gujit 2006).
- PM&E and beneficiary feedback mechanisms should be tailored to the local context and integrated into local political structures and processes (Vernooy et al 2006). This requires careful facilitation and analysis, which is dependent upon the investment of time and resources (Vernooy et al 2006, Jacobs 2010).
- Although ICTs present opportunities for scaling up beneficiary feedback mechanisms, the advantages of these tools are largely unproven. It is important that ICTs are not viewed as a ‘magic bullet’ and that they are carefully tailored to context.

2. General literature on PM&E

<u>Literature reviews</u>

Estrella, M. and Gaventa, J., 1998, ‘Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review’, IDS Working Paper No. 70, IDS, Brighton
http://faculty.miis.edu/docs/fipse/project_design,_implementation_and_evaluation/readings/participatoryeval1.pdf

This paper reviews the literature on PM&E, assessing experiences from a range of actors (donors, NGOs and CBOs) around the world. PM&E draws on a number of participatory traditions which date back to the 1970s, including participatory action research and participatory learning and action. PM&E approaches have been adopted by donors since the 1980s. PM&E practice and thinking is ‘widespread and extremely diverse’ (p. 6). Based on the experiences identified in this study, five functions of PM&E have been highlighted:

- Impact assessment.
- Project management and planning.
- Organisational strengthening or institutional learning.
- Understanding and negotiating stakeholder perspectives.
- Public accountability.

PM&E has historically been used for impact assessment and project management, but has increasingly been used for organisational strengthening, understanding stakeholder perspectives and public accountability. The paper describes a shift away from scientific, technical approaches to evaluation, towards evaluation approaches that are characterised by negotiation between various stakeholders and more focused on action. The report highlights several benefits of PM&E:

- Improves understanding of the development process.
- Increases authenticity of M&E findings that are locally relevant.
- Improves sustainability.
- Increases local capacity in M&E.
- Increases efficiency and is more cost-effective.

The paper concludes by making a number of issues in the field of PM&E, which need to be resolved or explored further:

- PM&E should be understood as a social process – power dynamics should be recognised.
- Methodological issues should be addressed – more rigorous standards should be developed.
- PM&E should be institutionalised – including issues of resources and scaling up.
- There should be better documentation of PM&E experiences.

Chambers, R., 2007, 'Who Counts? The Quiet Revolution of Participation and Numbers', IDS Working Paper 296. IDS, Brighton www.ids.ac.uk/download.cfm?file=wp296.pdf

This paper provides an overview of the use of 'participatory numbers' in development practice and research. It argues that in many contexts, processes generating participatory numbers are better than traditional questionnaires. They provide greater validity, better insights, and increased knowledge gains for local people.

A number of overlapping strengths of participatory numbers are identified:

- Participatory numbers have been taken to scale through participatory surveys, through aggregation from focus groups and through wealth and well-being ranking.
- Innovative participatory approaches have been developed to overcome the challenge of comparing poverty levels between communities.
- Statistical principles can be applied to participatory numbers. There have been breakthroughs in producing more accurate national statistics and also on subjects inaccessible through questionnaires.
- Comparisons of the cost and accuracy of questionnaires and participatory numbers favour the latter. Conventional questionnaires should be used only if no participatory alternative can be devised.
- The evidence suggests significant potential that could be professionally transformative and could lead to better understanding of realities, better numbers, and better policies and practices.

The paper makes a number of challenges facing the effective use of participatory quantitative approaches:

- Participatory numbers face methodological challenges, notably trade-offs between participatory open-endedness and standardisation for comparability.
- Other trade-offs concern scale and quality involving time, resources, availability of skilled facilitators, and the costs of implementation.
- Participatory numbers have yet to gain adequate recognition in mainstream professional practice. Prevailing mindsets need to be challenged.

A full summary from GSDRC's document library can be found here:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3002

Hilhorst, T. and Gujit, I., 2006, 'Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Process To Support Governance and Empowerment at the Local Level. A Guidance Paper', Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands http://www.kit.nl/net/KIT_Publicaties_output/showfile.aspx?e=925

This paper examines how a PM&E approach can enhance participation, empowerment and governance in World Bank-supported projects and programmes. It argues that the approach contributes to demand-led planning and decision-making, and improved accountability, when effective communication and feedback loops are in place with programmes and agencies. They identify three trends that have driven PM&E's development:

- Frustration with the limited abilities of other approaches to capture local knowledge and views.
- The need to work to ensure projects remain relevant to local people's priorities.
- Pressure to enhance accountability to local people.

A PM&E process can enhance local governance and participation in World Bank-supported projects and programmes. For local governance, PM&E can:

- Enhance efficiency and effectiveness - PM&E processes can contribute to results-based management by improving policymaking, facilitating adaptive management, enhancing efficiency of resource use and promoting staff motivation.
- Improve the exercise of power - some characteristics of the exercise of power are openness, transparency, responsiveness, predictability and accountability. Gathering and sharing information and dialogue are key features of PM&E processes, which contribute to openness and transparency.
- Enhance equity of outcomes - ensuring equity of outcomes requires commitment of all stakeholder groups to question the existing distribution of services. It involves an assessment into the responsiveness of projects, service providers, and/or local government as perceived by groups of (potential) users who tend to be marginalised or socially excluded.
- Enhance stakeholder interactions - usually there are multiple stakeholders involved in local development. Well-structured PM&E systems may help communities and civil society organisation to develop partnerships with projects, office bearers and other stakeholders.

A full summary from GSDRC's document library can be found here:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3306

Evaluative Studies

Veernoy, R., Qui, S., and Jianchu, X., 2006 'The Power of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Insights from South-West China', Development In Practice, Vol. 15, Issue. 5, pp. 400-411
www.informaworld.com/.../content~db=all~content=a749174781~frm=abslink

This article assesses the experience of two research teams at incorporating PM&E into natural resource management programmes in South West China. The authors identify a number of barriers to utilising PM&E in this context. These include problems regarding the sustainability of PM&E mechanisms and the difficulty of building PM&E onto existing community structures and integrating them into local governance structures and political processes. They argue that institutionalising PM&E will require more field practice and a better understanding of local power relations, 'greater integration in the processes of organisational development' and 'stronger connections with agendas of political change'.

Parkinson, S., 2009, 'Power and perceptions in participatory monitoring and evaluation', Evaluation and Program Planning, No. 32, pp. 229–237

This paper looks at the PM&E mechanisms in a large rural development programme in Uganda, focusing in particular on the assumptions that underpin these mechanisms. It argues that there was a 'mismatch between programme assumptions and participant perceptions, which stymied the implementation of PM&E' (p.229). The programme was designed on the assumption that information sharing and communication was free and open, while the farmers who benefited from the programme felt that the 'accountability requirements of the programme were not their concern' and were extremely conscious of power differences that separated them from programme officials (p.229). The paper recommends that a heightened awareness of power dynamics and political factors is needed in the design of PM&E.

As with other participatory approaches to development, PM&E mechanisms often make three implicit assumptions that fail to address politics:

- They assume that beneficiaries are 'free agents'.
- They assume that beneficiaries understand programmes at face value, ignoring perceptions that see them as sources of patronage.
- Development discourse in recent years has tended to see participation as an end in itself.

The paper generated a number of findings:

- The paper describes how local officials were reluctant to implement PM&E tools, displaying grudging acceptance and in some cases 'stonewalling' these initiatives. Another important problem was that farmers experienced difficulties in filling out the PM&E forms.
- The paper questions the assumption of 'community-mindedness' that underpinned the programme. In fact, farmers' groups were not coherent and many more educated farmers expected compensation for coordinating the monitoring work.
- The programme also assumed that communication within farmers' groups was good. In fact, the paper found that marginalised farmers often did not understand the basic activities of the group. This communication gap was partly an expression of power relations: the better-connected farmers deliberately hoarded information as a means of capturing resources.
- Despite these drawbacks, PM&E mechanisms did improve the effectiveness of the project. In some cases this was due to the individual commitment of a few individuals. The project was most successful in communities where there was greater group coherence and trust.
- The case highlights the point that successful use of PM&E is dependent upon careful analysis of participants' objectives as well as time and resources.

Björkman, M. and J. Svensson, 2009, 'Power To The People: Evidence From A Randomized Field Experiment On Community Monitoring In Uganda', Quarterly Journal of Economics, Vol 124, No. 2, pp 735-769
'http://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publications/53_Bjorkman_Svensson_Power_to_the_People.pdf

This paper presents a randomised field experiment in 50 communities from nine districts in Uganda. It examined the impact of community scorecards on primary health care delivery. Communities were encouraged by local NGOs to be more involved with state health provision and strengthened their capacity to hold the state to account. It finds that 'the community-based monitoring project increased the quality and quantity of primary health care provision. A year after the first round of [community] meetings we find a significant difference in the weight of infants…and a 33% reduction in under five mortality in the treatment communities. Utilization for general outpatient services was 20% higher…and the overall effect across a set of utilization measures is large and significantly positive' (p.1). The paper argues that these results were more cost-effective than results achieved by other health interventions.

Pratt, B. and T. Myhrman, 2009, 'Improving aid effectiveness: A review of recent initiatives for civil society organisations', INTRAC http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/623/Improving-aid-effectiveness-A-review-of-recent-initiatives-for-CSOs.pdf

This paper reviews recent initiatives by CSOs to improve aid effectiveness. It questions why CSOs have increasingly used the language of effectiveness in the current moment. It argues that this is largely motivated by a combination of donor concerns, internal soul-searching and greater public scrutiny. It assesses some specific proposals from a recent 'Forum for CSO Effectiveness' and criticises the proposals for being too defensive and for confusing development NGOs with broader civil society. It identifies five types of CSO effectiveness initiatives and highlights some associated issues:

- Attempts to mirror official agencies by providing CSO parallel initiatives to the Paris Declaration.
- Initiatives to improve accountability. This paper demonstrates that although these initiatives are committed to beneficiary participation at the rhetorical level, in practice many only succeed in widening access to information among staff and donors.
- Quality control mechanisms. There has been a growing emphasis on the procedures for delivering aid, which often leads to neglect of a programme's wider impact.
- Standardised guidelines of implementation and delivery mechanisms: e.g. for humanitarian work, advocacy, micro credit.
- Assessment of impact and effectiveness. Much of the effectiveness debate confuses effectiveness with efficiency.

The report is critical of organisations such as Keystone Accountability that have used beneficiary feedback mechanisms. It argues that organisations that conduct feedback surveys with beneficiaries can neglect broader 'cooperation and dialogue with beneficiaries during the planning and implementation process' and may give 'little attention to process, rather to outcome' (p.18). There is a danger that beneficiary feedback may replace participation as a goal, and be regarded as sufficient. It argues that these approaches may be 'attractive to new corporate based donors and those looking for a simple system which can illustrate that these issues have been dealt with in the letter if not the spirit of real accountability' (p.7).

3. Beneficiary Feedback

Research papers

Barder, O., 2009, 'Beyond Planning: Markets and Networks for Better Aid', Center for Global Development, Working Paper 185, October
www.cgdev.org/files/1422971_file_Beyond_Planning_FINAL.pdf

This paper advocates a 'collaborative market' for aid as a means of overcoming deficiencies in the current political economy of aid agencies. It argues that a 'considered combination of market mechanisms, networked collaboration, and collaborative regulation' would lead to improved effectiveness. It advocates reforms that 'put pressure on the aid system to evolve in the right direction rather than on grand designs'. Measures might include unbundling funding from aid management to create more explicit markets, better information gathered from the intended beneficiaries of aid and a significant increase in the transparency and accountability of donor agencies.

The paper identifies the broken 'feedback loop' between beneficiaries and donors as one of the critical challenges facing the current aid system. It argues that there is currently too much focus on inputs, and not enough on results and impacts. Rigorous evaluations of impacts are rarely conducted or made widely available. Attempts have been made to engage citizens in the planning processes, but these participatory processes (for example those conducted as part of the PRSPs) have been 'very indirect' and not successful.

Barder identifies two ways of closing the feedback loop – short-chain accountability and long-chain accountability. Short-chain accountability involves giving 'beneficiaries more control over the organisations that deliver services', for example by providing them with vouchers (p.20). Long-chain accountability involves placing 'much greater emphasis to transparency, community engagement, measurement of results and feedback through the political system' (p.20). Network approaches may also provide a way of closing the feedback loop 'by providing more accessible information about what is working' (p.26). A good example of this kind of initiative is the Humanitarian Response Index. Client feedback could be used in procurement – where various providers could bid in an eBay-style system, where past clients' feedback could influence selection.

Jacobs, A., 2010 forthcoming, 'Creating The Missing Feedback Loop', unpublished article, forthcoming in IDS Bulletin

This paper provides an overview and assessment of the use of beneficiary feedback mechanisms in development. It begins by clarifying the concept's relationship with PM&E and 'social accountability'. It examines a number of examples of how feedback has been used in development programmes and assesses the evidence of impact. The report concludes by highlighting three key challenges and suggesting responses and reforms that could increase the uptake of these mechanisms.
The paper is positive about the potential contribution beneficiary feedback mechanisms can be an effective way of improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of development projects. These techniques are likely to improve sustainability and impact, and can be empowering to beneficiaries. There are a number of established PM&E techniques, including citizen or community report cards and the 'coping strategies index', which demonstrate that these mechanisms can be used to enhance the effectiveness of development projects.

Feedback mechanisms carry the risk, however, that agencies may receive only a partial impression of beneficiaries' views. The most marginalised groups (including in many cases women) may be excluded, and the results may be misleading or reinforce the power of dominant groups. There may be a number of problems with data collection, which should be carefully planned and facilitated to create conditions for open feedback. The most significant barrier to implementing feedback systems is 'the incentives that shape management and organisational behaviour'. The costs of implementing these systems outweigh the benefits for managers and organisations. Funding tends to be awarded not to organisations that can demonstrate beneficiary satisfaction but by those that can demonstrate success in achieving short-term pre-determined activities.

These incentives could be tackled if donors the following steps were taken:

- Donors and senior managers required quantified reports of beneficiary satisfaction.
- Donors published reports of beneficiary satisfaction, creating a new norm in their practice.
- Civil society actors collecting and publishing feedback data independently of donors and implementing agencies.
- Research was conducted that demonstrated the value added by feedback and celebrating successes.
- Cheaper and simpler feedback tools were developed.

Jacobs, A., C. Barnett and R. Ponsford, 2010 (forthcoming), 'Three approaches to monitoring: feedback systems, participatory monitoring and evaluation and logical frameworks', IDS Bulletin forthcoming

This paper compares three different approaches to monitoring development programmes: the logical framework approach, PM&E and feedback systems. It argues that feedback systems combine PM&E's capacity to work with beneficiaries and support their empowerment with logframes' capacity to meet the needs of senior decision makers. The paper provides a brief overview of each of these three approaches.

It describes how feedback systems have grown out of three bodies of work: participatory monitoring and evaluation, social accountability and customer satisfaction. It argues that the case for using feedback systems is still unproven – 'They appear to offer significant benefits and some suggestive examples are emerging. But significant questions remain unanswered'.

Well-implemented feedback systems can generate monitoring data for senior decision makers and improve practice at the field level. They can improve implementation by ensuring that projects are well-tailored to beneficiaries' needs. They can also create incentives for organisations and units within organisations to improve their practice. The potential risks associated with feedback systems are similar to those linked to other PM&E approaches. They may generate misleading findings or be captured by dominant groups who can use them for political purposes. Feedback systems will only be effective 'if implementing staff and organisations have the flexibility to deliberate and respond to the data'. Competing organisational incentives may also need to be overcome: 'Other factors may outweigh the views of local people, such as relationships with donors, government agencies and political allies'.

The paper concludes that feedback systems may help to 'reduce the temptation to design monitoring systems that attempt to measure too much, too quickly and in the process become burdensome and unmanageable', but states that 'there is still a great deal to learn about how feedback systems work most cost effectively and in which contexts'.

Jacobs, A., 2005, 'Who counts? Financial reporting to beneficiaries', Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Issue 31, August http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2746

This article reviews MANGO's 'Who Counts' project, an attempt to encourage NGOs to make financial reports available to beneficiaries. It claims that evidence shows that this technique can 'substantially improve the quality of participation', reduce the risk of fraud and encourage more active dialogue between NGOs and beneficiaries. It cites an example of a primary school in Uganda where only 24 per cent of funds allocated by government were being received. After a government newspaper campaign which published financial reports of the school, corruption declined and the school received 84 per cent of its entitlement.

The article notes some risks associated with financial transparency:

- In conflict situations it can make beneficiaries and agencies more of a target.
- It can increase tensions between agencies, government and other interest groups.
- Financial reports may be manipulated for political gain.

It argues that these risks are likely to be most acutely felt during the early stages of an emergemcy response. The article argues that these techniques will need to be sensitively adapted to local circumstances.

ADB, 2007, 'Participatory Approaches to Rural Development', Learning Curves Series
http://www.adb.org/Documents/Evaluation/Learning-Curves/SES/LC-ParticipatoryApproaches-RuralDevelopment.pdf

This paper assesses whether participatory approaches offer an effective solution to the problems of project sustainability and relevance, based on the experience of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It found that the problems of project relevance and sustainability were persistent and argued that where ADB projects had been sustainable and relevant, it had not been the standard package of participatory approaches which made them so. The paper recommends greater use of beneficiary feedback approaches. More specifically, it argues that providers should be evaluated based on beneficiary feedback, and beneficiaries should be able to choose between a number of providers.

Brown, D., 2010, 'Listening to People on the Receiving End of Aid', Blog posted on 1st September 2010 on the Humanitarian and Development NGOs Blog, Hauser Center, Harvard University
http://hausercenter.org/iha/2010/09/01/listening-to-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-aid/

This blog post summarises some initial findings from 'The Listening Project', a 'comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people who live in societies that have been on the recipient side of international assistance'. It found that as a result of short-term incentive structures and time-frames, aid agency staff have little time for asking beneficiaries for feedback. 'Most agencies listen only to people who are in (not outside of) the chain of delivery and they listen primarily for assessments of efficiency or effectiveness of their projects'. Beneficiaries consistently reported that 'aid agencies should "invest the necessary time", "go more slowly", and "listen to people" in order to "learn about the real circumstances", "get to know people", and "show respect for people's ideas and opinions"'. The post concludes by stating '[p]eople have equated better listening with better outcomes and longer-term impacts. We have much to learn by listening to their ideas about how to improve the effectiveness of international assistance efforts'.

Individual case study reports and more information about The Listening Project can be found at the CDA website: http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/project_profile.php?pid=LISTEN&pname=Listening%20Project

Additional Information

MANGO's website provides guidelines about how to report to beneficiaries: http://www.mango.org.uk/Guide/HowReportToBeneficiaries

Listen First is a website established by MANGO and Concern to provide a draft set of tools and approaches that NGOs can use to make themselves more accountable to the people they serve: http://www.listenfirst.org/

4. Technology

Examples

There are a number of well-known examples of how new technologies have been used to facilitate beneficiary feedback. These include:

- Daraja[2] in Tanzania – an organisation that uses SMS messaging to provide feedback about the functioning of water services in their local area. Information is forwarded to relevant government authorities, enabling them to respond quickly. Daraja works with local governments to ensure they are more accountable to local communities, with local communities to boost awareness of their rights and the responsibilities of local governments and with national government – presenting research based on the knowledge the gain at a local and district level.

- GlobalGiving[3] partnered with Map Kibera[4] a website that collates community stories about any "community effort" and allows members of the public to post stories to a public SMS-feedback-enabled website. The pilot project relied on a network of local NGOs that fundraise on GlobalGiving to recruit local story collectors. This network collected 3000 stories about 242 organizations in 2 months, representing a broad sample of activities in 4 communities. Their evaluation found that 'local NGO staff and local evaluation experts were unable to provide the same information and could not predict the most common issues discussed in stories - meaning there is NO substitute for local perspectives' (Maxson comments).

[2] http://www.daraja.org/
[3] http://www.globalgiving.org/
[4] http://kibera.ushahidi.com/

- eMoksha[5] is an NGO that specialises in enabling citizen awareness using internet and mobile phones. It has established a number of SMS-enabled websites that allow citizens in India and Afghanistan to comment on their political system or to report problems with service delivery.

- Frontline SMS[6] is a software package that allows individuals or organisations to send text messages to large groups of people. It provides a means of allowing CBOs and NGOs to communicate more easily and effectively with the communities they serve. This technology has been used in humanitarian contexts (such as Haiti), providing an easy way for people in need of assistance to request help from NGOs.

- Ushahidi[7] is a Kenyan website that provides a platform that allows any person or organization 'to set up their own way to collect and visualize information'. This platform has been used to facilitate a number of initiatives including election monitoring and conflict prevention activities.[8] One of the most potentially significant applications of this technique has been in the humanitarian field. In **Haiti**, Ushahidi has been used to develop a 'crisis map of Haiti', where information is mapped in near real time from reports coming from inside Haiti from a number of sources (including SMS, email, phone, twitter). These reports are then mapped by volunteers based in the US, who identify GPS coordinates for the reports and 'geo-tag' them on the Ushahidi map.[9] This kind of initiative is potentially very significant in overcoming the challenge of coordination in humanitarian crises, and enhancing the work of agencies such as UNOCHA.

Research

Jackson, C. with E. Berdou, V. Ngounoue, C. Kreutz and L. Clark, 2009, 'Use Of Social Media To Share Knowledge On Agricultural Impact, Planning, Assessment and Learning (IPAL)', ALINe
http://www.aline.org.uk/pool/social-media-paper-mar10.pdf

This paper reviews the use of social media in agricultural impact, planning, assessment and learning (IPAL) in Africa. It is based on desk-based research. It finds that 'social media's overall relevance to the agricultural IPAL knowledge domain is modest. However, given our primary user context for IPAL knowledge are rural areas with low levels of investment in ICTs, this level of relevance is more significant than it would otherwise appear' (p. 1). The paper defines social media as media that 'enable people to create, publish, share, collaborate, discuss and network through a wide range of new, mainly digital, formats and platforms' (p.4). It recommends that 'the priority focus for any ALINe social media investment should be on actions that facilitated access to knowledge about agricultural IPAL and creation of knowledge for it. This should focus on actors primarily in rural locations and be based around content that places a light bandwidth demand on mobile phone platforms' (p. 20). It also recommends that the '[m]obile phone should be considered the primary platform for ALINe social media (especially with software exploiting ubiquitous and cheaper SMS and USSD protocols), with GPRS, 3G, internet and other digital tools including laptops as supplements when appropriate' (p.22). It suggests that donors could supplement airtime and handsets in the medium term (2-3 years) to 'off-set inequalities and capacity building to strengthen information literacy' (p.22).

[5] http://emoksha.org/
[6] http://www.frontlinesms.com/
[7] http://www.ushahidi.com/
[8] A range of examples can be found at these sites - http://www.ushahidi.com/platform, http://mobileactive.org/texting-it-in.
[9] http://haiti.ushahidi.com/page/index/1. CrisisCommons have a similar initiative - http://crisiscommons.org/gps/.

5. Related GSDRC Reports

The following GSDRC materials provide additional reading on conflict prevention:

Helpdesk research reports

- **New ICTs For Development** *(June 2010)* Please provide a comprehensive list of new information and communications technologies being used to enhance development outcomes in developing countries, a brief description of each and some key illustrative examples of each tool (where possible providing a brief description of the results achieved with numbers and how the tool works in practice). http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD691.pdf
- **Community Monitoring of Service Delivery** *(February 2008)* Please provide examples of community (participatory) monitoring and evaluation projects for holding government accountable for service delivery and expenditure management. www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD508.pdf

6. Additional information

Author

This query response was prepared by Oliver Walton, oliver@gsdrc.org

Experts consulted:

Matt Morris, Research Fellow, ANU
Alex Jacobs, Director of Research, Keystone Accountability
Marc Maxson, GlobalGiving
Ronnie Vernooy, IDRC
Kristin Ferguson, Evaluation Unit Coordinator, IDRC
Laura Hudson, Project Manager, Frontline SMS
Ken Banks, Founder, Kiwanja.net
Melissa Ulbricht, Mobileactive.org
Katrin Verclas, Mobileactive.org

Selected websites visited
ADB, Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network (ALINe), CARE, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Concern, Daraja, Eldis, FrontlineSMS, GlobalGiving, GSDRC, Hauser Centre, IDRC, IDS, Inter Cooperation, INTRAC, Keystone Accountability, Listen First, MANGO, Monitoring and Evaluation News, ODI HPN, Owen Abroad, Oxfam, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Virtual Economics, World Bank