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Monitoring and evaluating development as a knowledge industry: ideas in current practice

> *It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry* (Einstein, 1951).

With these words of caution, Albert Einstein unconsciously hinted at one of the central challenges in today's development practices. In the knowledge age, we are surrounded by a diverse range of innovations and knowledge-intensive processes, often supported by new forms of information technology. Knowledge is considered the central commodity in the development 'knowledge industry' and if we are to understand what works in development then we have to understand the important role that knowledge plays. The most precious means we have at our disposal to do this is our capacity to reflect, connect, inquire, and learn in order to make sense of our ever-changing environment, relationships and very own purpose and nature. However, in development work, a crucial mainstreamed practice that supports management decisions, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), regularly fails to make full use of these human capacities, and is rarely equipped to dealing with questions about the role of knowledge in development.

Although the existing literature offers excellent insights in the current practices to monitor and evaluate knowledge management (KM), some deeper issues have not been addressed explicitly enough to do justice to the philosophical and practical ground on which the Information and Knowledge Management Emergent (IKM-E) programme firmly stands. In order to redress these shortcomings, this paper, and another follow-up paper (Monitoring and evaluating development as a knowledge ecology, Le Borgne et al. 2011) offer a journey through the many fascinating worlds of monitoring and evaluation of knowledge management for development. This paper offers an overview of the field and where it might be heading.

The paper first clears the ground by offering firm definitions on the key concepts involved, sheds light on the dark areas of current practices and paradigms before briefly concluding on the need to address the multiple knowledges that are contributing to the journey. The journey preparations end with signposts that have been theorized and/or implemented in order to shed some light along the way and clear a path that could be followed.

Throughout this paper, the authors have taken the 'strong' view of the monitoring and evaluation of knowledge management. That is, they have assumed that knowledge has its own role as a lead player

in the design, practice, and outcomes of development programs and projects. As a lead player, knowledge has its own particular requirements for M&E, and those requirements apply to the initiative as a whole.

There is a gap between the knowledge industry supported by organizations and the knowledge needs of their clients. M&E is often allocated a 'weak' position in the design of a development project. That weakness is reinforced by the dominance of a requirement to measure outputs, thus eliminating an understanding of the intangibles of trust, respect, translation, and collaboration, the reason for the journey into social change in the first place.

In reviewing the requirements of M&E for the development sector, the authors have examined the barriers to effectiveness and the questions that need to be asked. Addressing these barriers and answering these questions requires recognition of the many interests involved, each with their own ideals, sources of information and avenues for action. In particular they have recognized that decisions on the design, conduct and outcomes of a development initiative are determined by multiple knowledges, those of key individuals, the affected community, the specialist advisors, the influential organisations, and the holistic focus of the initiative in the first place.

A review of the models of M&E most frequently applied in the development sector found that these considered single dimensions of an intervention, rather than attempting to provide an understanding of the whole. In summary, few if any of the current approaches to M&E take account of the flows of ideals, facts, ideas and actions that make up the iterative learning cycle of any initiative for social change. Even less are they likely to recognize, much less include, the multiple knowledges involved in the course of a development programme. There is need to develop a framework which encompasses all of these dimensions. In a follow-on paper, we discuss what such a framework could look like and propose a collective enquiry approach as a possible way forward.