



MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING PRACTICES

of Local Governments
and Local Governments
Associations

 **UCLG CIB**
Working Group
Capacity and Institution
Building

 **UCLG**
United Cities
and Local Governments

 **VNG**
International

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 **Generalitat de Catalunya**

 **Ajuntament de Barcelona**



UCLG CIB
Working Group
Capacity and Institution
Building

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

Author

Carlos Hernandez Ferreiro

Chairs of the CIB Working Group

Peter Knip, Director of VNG International
Sebastien Hamel, Senior Director of FCM
International

Coordination and editing

Renske Steenbergen, VNG International
Jessie Post, VNG International

CIB Secretariat

Nassaulaan 12, The Hague (Netherlands)
+31 70 373 84 01
uclg.cib@vng.nl
www.cib-uclg.org

Design

Gabrijan Communication Concepts

Proofreading

Giles Stacey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report looks at the practices of the members of the Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in the area of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (ME&L). The report is based on a survey questionnaire completed by 19 members plus individual interviews and a group discussion to check and refine the survey conclusions.

The picture emerging is one of incrementalism in the incorporation of ME&L into the actual practices of the members of the CIB Working Group:

- one where organizations have come to understand the multiple values of ME&L, but where project-based ME&L still takes precedence over broader and more ambitious designs;
- one where ME&L is still unevenly implemented across the multiple levels of activity within the organization, but where efforts at systematization can be observed;
- one where reporting requirements are still important drivers, but where organizations are increasingly emphasizing the learning aspects of the ME&L agenda.

/ OBJECTIVES

1. The most important objective of ME&L systems is to track a project's progress in order to make informed implementation decisions, with complying with donors' reporting requirements a close second. More generally, participating organizations seem to emphasize the Monitoring aspects over the Evaluation or Learning aspects of their ME&L policies.

/ ORGANIZATION

1. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is, for most respondents, one of the responsibilities of programme managers.

2. Generally, organizations in which programme managers are entrusted with ME&L tasks tend to be more programme-centred than in those where ME&L is carried out by specialized individuals or units. The former comes at the cost of a certain disregard of organization-level priorities.

3. While there is not a consistent profile, some aspects emerge as more important in the practice of organizations that do not have specialized ME&L staff in their organogram. The aspects that seem to be important are: the elaboration of Terms of Reference (ToRs) for external consultants and experts; the implementation of Monitoring and Evaluation activities at the programme level; and contributing to programme development by developing ME&L protocols at the programme level.

4. In organizations that rely on designated ME&L functions/units, the aspects addressed are slightly more consistent. These include: the Monitoring and Evaluation of the functioning and overall development of the organization; contributing to programme and project development; elaborating ToRs for external consultants plus other programme-related ME&L functions.

5. Nearly all those who responded to the questionnaire make use of external consultants to support the implementation of ME&L. Only, four organizations reported not using consultants. With the exception of the eThekweni municipality, which has a separate ME&L unit, these were organizations with rather small programme-based ME&L systems.

/ FUNDING

1. The levels of funding for ME&L activities reported by the respondents were generally lower (below 7% of project funding) than the literature would lead one to expect irrespective of whether this concerned third-party or core funding. The few exceptions to this 'norm' reported spending between 7% and 13% of project funding. However, these figures seem too low to be realistic..

2. There is some consistency between the ME&L funding structure and the overall orientation of the ME&L system. As such, organizations working with third-party funding are consistently more programme-oriented when it comes to defining their ME&L systems.

/ TOOLS AND METHODS

1. When it comes to the use of various Monitoring and Evaluation tools, the results of the survey are essentially consistent with the results reported in the previous report. Some changes can be observed with specific methodologies, which seem to have become better known and more widely used by the members of the CIB Working Group (specifically, the Theory of Change is more used whereas the Most Significant Change approach continues to be rarely used).

2. Notably, organizations where programme managers are at the centre of ME&L the implementation, do seem to use a slightly larger toolbox when it comes to the Monitoring and Evaluation methods than those organizations that have separate ME&L profiles.

/ LEARNING

1. Learning processes seem to be treated somewhat separately, almost as if they are developing and evolving on a separate track. Most of the organizations that participated in the CIB Working Group meeting in South Africa in September 2017 admitted that their learning systems are more an expression of an emerging area of organizational development than a consolidated set of policies and procedures that actually inform the organization's practices in an integrated fashion across all levels of activity.

2. The typical learning strategy of our respondents is more likely to use outcome mapping as a means of enhancing the overall strategic profile of the organization. This involves focusing mostly on activity-based knowledge mapping to support improvements in management processes; promoting the establishment of communities of practice in order to enhance collaboration and peer-to-peer assistance to foster knowledge sharing; and, finally, focusing on the development of shared network drives in order to capture, store and organize knowledge.

3. Most importantly, from the point of view of systematization and consistency, organizations' learning strategies do seem to be using relevant tools for the right purposes.



INTRODUCTION

This report looks at the practices of the members of the Capacity and Institution Building Working Group (CIB)¹ of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in the area of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (ME&L). This document complements the work that the CIB Working Group started in 2015 (which resulted in a publication in 2016)². The current document tries to dig deeper into the actual practices of the organizations themselves in order to understand how Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is actually organized and carried out.

This report is written on the basis of the analysis of survey data, interviews and a group discussion of the preliminary results for this report organized during the 2017 annual CIB Working Group meeting, which took place in South Africa between the 26th and the 28th of September 2017. This research actively involved 19 members of the CIB Working Group³.

This report focuses on specific aspects of the M&E policies of the group members, such as the roles and objectives of M&E policies, the way in which M&E is organized within the members of the group, current funding mechanisms and what tools and methods are mostly being used. The report includes a discussion on how learning is organized within the members of the CIB Working Group.

The relationships linking Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning cannot be overstated. Although the three are rightly seen as part of a broader organizational learning cycle, the reality in many organizations operating in the field of capacity development is that these three elements do not necessarily come together, or at least they are

¹ Members are listed in the annex of this publication.

² See Beatriz Sanz-Cornella 2016: *Measuring Capacity Development of Local & Regional Governments* http://www.cib-uclg.org/sites/default/files/report_web_0.pdf

³ Here it is important to make a distinction between the level of the "learning organization" and the level of the learning activities promoted by the members of the working group as part of their organizational mandate (capacity development).

This report focuses on how organizations learn internally in order to improve the way they operate, what are their main learning objectives and what tools do they mostly use in order to achieve these aims.

not as mechanically linked as the idea of a learning cycle may lead us to expect.

For example, it is very common to find organizations with a strong capacity to generate information and knowledge, through well-developed Monitoring and Evaluation systems, but that, at the same time, fail to structure and disseminate the knowledge generated in a way that fosters a broader learning cycle within the organization. Similarly, it is common to find organizations where Monitoring and Evaluation policies and Learning policies serve somewhat different development objectives.

That is why, when designing this research, we opted to extricate Monitoring and Evaluation practices from the learning policies and tools of the organizations. This has allowed us to assess:

- The reality of learning activities and processes within the organizations and the tools they use;
- The consistency of these with the Monitoring and Evaluation cycles/policies within the organizations here.
- This report is written without a blueprint as to what constitutes a 'good' Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system. As a result, organizations are not ranked in terms of 'doing better'.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning has, over the last decade or so, seen a process of inflated importance that, in many organizations, has significantly altered the focus from what these organizations want to achieve, to what they can measure. This trend has been complemented with an increasing emphasis on numbers over narratives.

While being able to measure (and understand) the outputs, outcomes and impacts of one's actions is important, this should not necessarily mean that ME&L should take 'precedence over more substantive parts of an organization's work. On the contrary, ME&L tools and systems should be seen as helping to rationalize the way organizations think about themselves and their own agency.

Only to the extent that an ME&L system satisfies the needs of a given organization, both in terms of the quality and quantity of information produced and the way in which it is disseminated, can we qualify it as adequate. In some cases, this will entail incredibly detailed and complex systems, which can turn every project into a quasi-experiment in social and institutional change. In others, more down-to-earth approaches and simple tools will do the job.

This report is testimony to (and has embraced) the current diversity of approaches within the members of the CIB Working Group. In that sense, it is written with a view to continue fostering a necessary dialogue between the members of the working group on these issues: one that highlights some of the existing good practices and helps all the members to continue to reflect on how they can best serve their mission and vision through their ME&L policies and tools.





MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

CIB UCLG MEMBERS RESEARCH



**ME&L IN THE INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION AMONG LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR
ASSOCIATIONS:
A REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES**

ME&L ROLES AND OBJECTIVES

/ ME&L ROLE

One of the key aspects in understanding the way in which ME&L systems work is to try to characterize their role and main objectives.

Generally, it can be said that Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning play a role across all areas of the work of the organizations studied in this report.

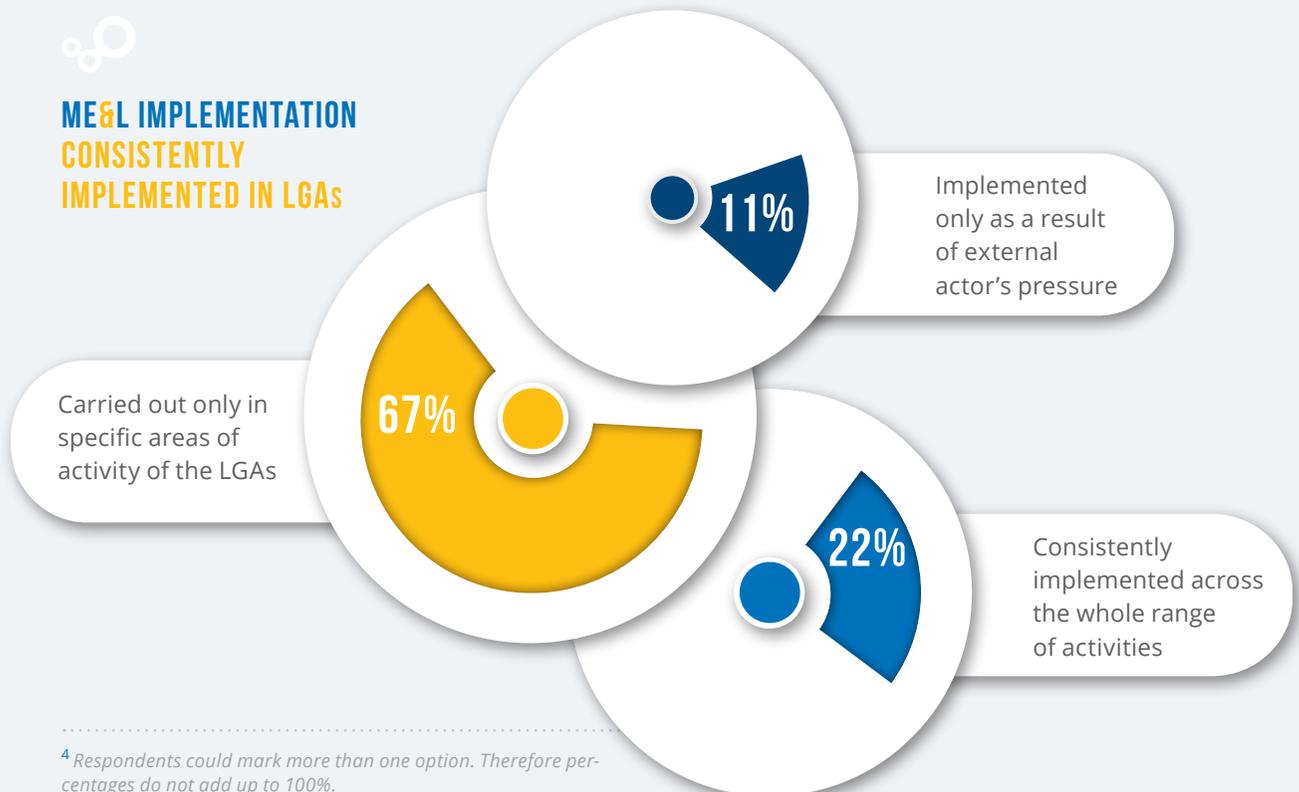
Whether for capacity development and other activities within the organizational mandates of the LGAs (42% of respondents) or for international cooperation projects (61% of respondents), organizations seem to have adopted ME&L strategies⁴. Further, the majority of the organizations analysed (61%) connect ME&L to the processes of organizational development (including accountability and learning).

Yet, ME&L policies are not consistently implemented across the whole range of activities of a given organization (only 22% of respondents indicated that this was the case). On the contrary, ME&L are either carried out in specific areas of an LGA's activities (67% of respondents) or implemented only as a result of pressure from external actors (11%).

When asked about the existence of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning guidelines, the majority of respondents indicated that these are normally developed at the project level (55%), while only 11% of respondents declared having general Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning guidelines. Moreover, 16% of respondents claimed not to have any sort of guiding documents to inform their practice in this area.



ME&L IMPLEMENTATION CONSISTENTLY IMPLEMENTED IN LGAs



⁴ Respondents could mark more than one option. Therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

The picture emerging from the data mentioned above is one of incrementalism in the incorporation of ME&L into the actual practices of the members of the CIB Working Group: one where organizations have come to understand the multiple values of ME&L, but where project-based ME&L still dominates over broader and more ambitious designs; one where ME&L is still unevenly implemented across the multiple levels of activities within an organization but where efforts at systematization can be recognized; and one where reporting requirements are still important drivers although organizations are increasingly emphasizing the learning aspects of the ME&L agenda.

This view is further supported when we look at the purposes of ME&L policies in the participating organizations.

/ ME&L PURPOSES

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank eight different purposes or functions of ME&L by order of importance to their organizations.

Overall, tracking a project's progress in order to make informed implementation decisions was seen as the most important objective of ME&L systems (60% of respondents placed this as either the first or second most important purpose of their ME&L systems), with complying with donors' reporting requirements coming second. Next, understanding our performance as an organization when implementing development programmes/projects and extracting lessons learned for new initiatives (which 35% of the respondents placed in their top two) completed the top three. The full ranking is as follows:

Table 1 • Ranking of ME&L purposes

RANKING	PURPOSE	SCORE⁵
1	Tracking project/programme's progress in order to make informed decisions about the project/programme implementation;	6.06
2	Complying with external donors reporting requirements at the project/programme level;	5.35
3	Understanding our performance as an organisation when implementing development programmes/projects and extracting lessons learned for new initiatives;	5.18
4	Assessing and understanding the general performance of the organisation and improving management systems, organisational structuring and the quality of our procedures;	4.41
5	Facilitating the professional development of the staff and providing them with better tools and techniques for improving their functions;	4.00
6	Enhancing the transparency of our organisation vis-à-vis our stakeholders (at the project level but also at the organisational level);	3.88
7	Collecting information and building data sets that can be used in further development initiatives of the organisation (or as part of advocacy platforms/initiatives);	3.76
8	Developing fact-based communication products (fact-sheet, videos, etc.), which highlight the effectiveness of our work and support our fundraising efforts;	3.35

⁵ Scores are calculated in the following manner. Each purpose is assigned to one position in the ranking by the respondent. Each position in the scale is assigned a score between 8 and 1 (8 for the most important, 7 for the second, etc.). The points awarded by each respondent are then totalled and divided by the total number of responses.



ME&L MAIN PURPOSES BY PRIORITIES



What is interesting to observe in this ranking is that, generally, participating organizations view the monitoring purposes as more important than the evaluation or learning aspects of their Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning policies.

The top-two ranked purposes are intrinsically connected to management or reporting requirements of project or programme implementation, and are essentially addressed through monitoring protocols. The two ranked 3 and 4 are more closely related to what is commonly understood as the main objectives of an evaluation framework (even though it could be argued that there are already some components of learning - extracting lessons learned and improving systems). Meanwhile, the purposes ranked 5 and 7 reflect some of the core areas of what constitutes 'the learning organization' (notably priority 5). That is, these reflect an organization that generates, collects and uses data and information in a systematic fashion in order to facilitate the learning of its members⁶.

Finally, two other purposes of ME&L – improving the organization's transparency and communication capacity seem to play only a subsidiary role (with some exceptions as four organizations out of the 19 organizations taking part in this research ranked enhancing transparency in the top-two purposes of their ME&L systems). The fact that monitoring seems to be generally prioritized over other aspects such as learning suggests ME&L systems that have been growing from the bottom-up, expanding from processes at the programme implementation level (whether in the context of core organizational activities or international cooperation activities) and slowly becoming more complex and ambitious.

It is worth noting that the role of international donors in this process remains important. Overall, as the survey shows, donors' reporting requirements remain an important driving force informing the development of ME&L systems.

Unsurprisingly, the influence of donors' requirements seems to be most marked in organizations at the so-called "beneficiary end" of the aid relationship. Nevertheless, this influence can also be observed in many of the respondents at the "aid-providing" end of the spectrum, even in those with relatively large development cooperation budgets. Generally, the funding structure of the organization seems to play a major role here: the more dependent on third-party funding that ME&L activities are, the more prominence donor's requirements seem to have in the ME&L activities.

However, as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems become more complex and ambitious, donors' requirements become a much less defining factor in the way these are structured (even in organizations with a major portfolio of third-party funded programmes or projects). Further, when ME&L responsibilities are located beyond the strict boundaries of international cooperation departments, donor's requirements seem to have a significantly less important role in ME&L systems.

Whether limiting the influence of donor's ME&L requirements should become an objective from the point of view of organizational development, is a matter that can be subject to discussion. The general perception is that donors' requirements could come to have a negative influence on organizational development. This is to some extent true as, in some cases, requirements have become so demanding and limiting that they have affected substantive parts of the work of organizations working with third-party funds. However, it would be wrong to qualify donors' influence as largely negative. On the contrary, for many organizations, starting to work with third-party funding and complying with reporting demands is a stepping stone to developing the first elements of a ME&L policy (and mobilizing financial resources to that end), which may later become progressively embedded in the practices of the organization. This applies equally to organizations in the North and in the South.

⁶ See: Peter M. Senge 2006: *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization* New York: Currency Double Day

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF DONOR'S REQUIREMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ME&L SYSTEMS

The role of donors in influencing how Local Government Associations look at the development of their own ME&L systems was discussed during the meeting of the CIB Working Group. Notably, the dominant views expressed during the meeting addressed some of the more negative aspects. These included:

- The fact that donors' requirements force organizations to focus their ME&L systems on aspects of an association's work that may not be the most relevant from a learning perspective – outputs/outcomes rather than impact;

- The fact that donor funding imposes a rather short-term view. The lifespan of a project may not be the best timeframe to understand an association's contribution to real change;

- The fact that donor's requirements may impose certain methodologies or force organizations not to use others, in particular peer-based tools and self-assessments.

These views are by no means new and show that there is still a long way to go to transcend the existing lack of trust and understanding between donors, implementers and beneficiaries in international cooperation projects and programmes. These barriers continue to affect the sense of ownership of different parties in cooperation initiatives in a way that transcends all levels of the project cycle (notably the ME&L).

Evaluation objectives play the second most important role in the development of ME&L systems. Here, the general preference is for project or programme-based assessments rather than a broader assessment of the organization's overall functioning.

This preference is consistent with the view of most respondents that projects and programmes continue to be at the core of the process of developing ME&L systems, whereas other aspects of the life of the organization may be perceived as subordinate or at least less central from the ME&L perspective.

Evaluation of the organizational performance (beyond operations) seems to play a more important role for eight of the organizations, and these are ones that appear to have developed more comprehensive ME&L systems. Generally, these are organizations that implement ME&L consistently across all levels of their activities; with five having staff permanently dedicated to ME&L, of which four have a structured unit. Further, these organizations mostly use core funding, or a combination of core and third-party funding, to support their ME&L efforts.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that three of the eight organizations that rank organizational evaluation within their top four ME&L purposes, still rank understanding the functioning of the organizations when managing operations as the main purpose.

Finally, in terms of learning objectives, respondents tend generally to focus on the improvement of their staff's capacities rather than knowledge generation activities.

However, a more detailed analysis shows diverging patterns. The four organizations that claim to implement ME&L consistently across all the levels do prioritize knowledge-generation activities (average score 4.5) over staff capacity development (score 3.5). An almost mirror image of this result is obtained when we look at those organizations (13) that claim not to implement ME&L consistently (on various levels), with knowledge generation scoring lower (3.5) in their priorities than staff development (4.15).

These results seem to point to a distinction on the ME&L level between a "learning organization", which is a characteristic of the majority of the responding organizations, and a subset of "knowledge-based" organizations, suggesting that there is a specific type of learning environment where knowledge generation and accumulation plays a more important role in the organization's development strategy.

This distinction should not be interpreted in normative terms (as to what is better or best – an interpretation often seen in the management literature), but with the understanding that ME&L systems have been developed to different levels that correspond to different organizational needs and strategies.

As mentioned earlier, ME&L systems, in most of our responding organizations, are intrinsically connected to the development of their activities (programmes or projects). In this context, one would expect them to prioritize learning objectives that have a more direct impact on the functioning of the organization's operations. Elsewhere, it is generally perceived that developing staff capacity takes precedence over knowledge generation and accumulation. This also seems to be the situation here judging by our survey's findings.

Those organizations which attach relatively greater importance to general organizational development in their ME&L seem to have a clear preference for knowledge generation objectives over staff development (4.38 to 3.75), whereas those organizations with a clearer focus on their operational profile in their ME&L are more balanced in addressing knowledge generation and staff development (3.92 to 3.75).



HOW IS ME&L ORGANIZED?

/ WHO DOES IT?

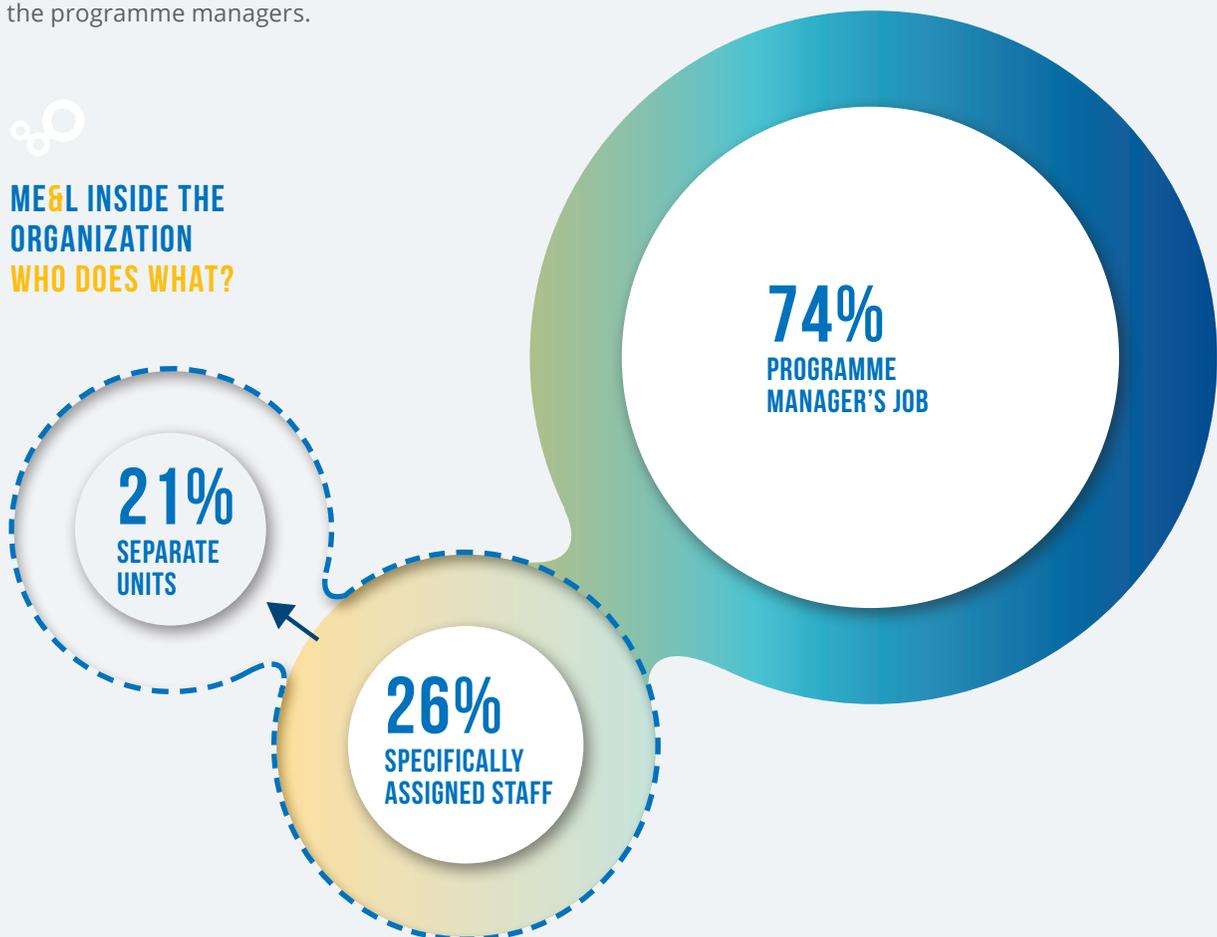
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is, for most respondents, part of the responsibilities of programme managers. Only five respondents (26%) reported that their organization had staff specifically assigned to ME&L functions, of which four (21%) reported having separate units in their organization that dealt with ME&L.

Assigning ME&L responsibilities to programme managers is a very common arrangement in organizations working in the fields of international cooperation and capacity development. Mainstreaming ME&L enables organizations to maximize, in a very cost-effective manner, the impact of ME&L activities on those individuals who are ultimately expected to be the main beneficiaries – the programme managers.

The downside to this approach is that, because of the functioning dynamics in organizations (specialization, inter-unit competition, etc.), ME&L may end up taking place in silos (even in contexts where there are shared guidelines and proceedings for ME&L). If this occurs, knowledge and learning will not transcend from the level of the individual or the specific unit in which that individual works to the level of the organization (or, if it does, only occasionally rather than systematically). Such dynamics can be reinforced by the diverging requirements of donors. As ME&L in this type of system is normally primarily programme-centred, the diverging requirements of donors may impose an extra difficulty when attempting to ensure consistency in ME&L approaches.



ME&L INSIDE THE ORGANIZATION WHO DOES WHAT?



/ STAFF ME&L FUNCTIONS

What was clear from our respondents is that there is not a uniform profile of the ME&L functions that programme managers are expected to fulfil. However some functions emerge more frequently in the practices of those organizations that do not have specialized profiles in their organogram: the elaboration of terms of reference for external consultants or experts (mentioned by 61% of respondents in this category); the implementation of programme-level monitoring and evaluation activities (again mentioned by 61% of respondents); contributing to programme development by developing programme-level ME&L protocols (mentioned by 53% of respondents in this category).

In those organizations that do have designated ME&L staff or units, the functions seen are slightly more consistent. These include: monitoring and evaluation of the functioning and overall development of the organization (83% of respondents in this category mentioned this function); contributing to programme and project development (mentioned by 66% of respondents); elaborating ToRs for external consultants and other programme-related ME&L functions (i.e. performing monitoring and evaluation activities at the programme level and supporting programme managers through training – mentioned by 50% of respondents in this category).

Unsurprisingly, the organizations where programme managers are entrusted with ME&L functions tend to be more programme-centred than those where ME&L is carried out by specialized individuals or units. That comes at the cost of a certain disregard of organization-level priorities.

Only 38% of respondents who saw their organisation as lacking a specific ME&L function/unit considered their programme managers as having a role in fostering innovation. Further, only 23% of them saw their programme manager's ME&L functions as including activities such as training or methodological development, codification of good practices or assessing organizational development. Moreover, when it comes to developing

and updating organizational guidelines, only 15% of these respondents saw this as one of the main functions of their programme managers.

However, when we look at the responses from representatives of organizations that do have specialized ME&L staff, where we would expect the focus to be on organizational aspects of ME&L, this was not the case. Only one organization with specialized ME&L staff included innovation and codification of organizational practice as part of the ME&L functions.

In a way, what the data seem to show, in terms of the comprehensiveness of the ME&L arrangements, is that organizations that have taken the step to develop specialized profiles in this area are capable and willing (at least on paper) to look at broader aspects of the life of the organization, and go beyond the activity level. As such, they Therefore have developed a more all-encompassing approach to ME&L.

However, that does not amount to say that these specialized units or individuals cover all possible functions of ME&L in the life of an organization. As shown before, key elements such as the codification of the organizations' practice remain outside the remit of these bodies. This may be the result of the lack of integration of learning agenda into the practice of these units.



DOES THE WAY WE ORGANIZE ME&L ACTUALLY WORK FOR US?

One of the most interesting discussions during the CIB Meeting looked at the extent to which current models of organizing ME&L are actually serving the purposes and objectives of the group members.

Interestingly, common challenges were identified by organizations sitting at opposite ends of the organizational spectrum (project-manager-centred vs specialized units/profiles). Both FCM and VNG International generally agreed that the nature of the work imposes limitations on the actual capacity of ME&L systems to convey a comprehensive and attractive picture of what is actually being achieved.

More importantly, while both organizations see their ME&L systems as mechanisms to “make organizations reflect/think”, they both recognize that it is still very difficult to consolidate learning processes at the organizational level based on

effective knowledge-sharing and pooling of individual capacities within the organization (due to a lack of time).

The experience of the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation shows that ME&L needs to be integrated as a corporate process, whereby ME&L becomes part of the organization’s way of doing things and ethos. Yet, even in organizations willing to advance in this direction, the challenges posed by fragmentation, inter-departmental competition or simple failure to communicate remain significant.

Overall, the debate seems to point to how “structural” factors, beyond the characteristics of the ME&L systems or structures in place, can significantly determine the degree of satisfaction that members of the CIB working group have with the quality and the outcomes of their own ME&L systems. As was evident in the discussion, organizations continue to search for effective ways to address these issues.

/ THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS

A large majority (80%) of the respondents to the questionnaire make use of external consultants in supporting ME&L implementation. Only four organizations reported not using consultants and, with the exception of eThekweni municipality that has a separate ME&L unit, these are organizations with rather small programme-based ME&L systems.

There are numerous reasons why external consultants might be involved in the work of a given organization. Sometimes they can be brought in to cover gaps (technical or other) in specific areas (such as programme development), or specific tasks and functions may be contracted out because they cannot be absorbed by the staff of the organization (for example, preparing Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines or draft-

ing specific sections of a programme proposal). Sometimes consultants are brought in because they can provide an external, impartial view on the functioning of the organization and its activities (notably during the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning cycle). At other times, they may help with the development of organizational capacities (through training, facilitation or the development of specific guidelines).

In those organizations where programme managers are responsible for ME&L activities, consultants are mostly involved in the evaluation cycle (70% of organizations in this category report this as one of the main functions of external consultants) and the programme proposal development cycle (50%). Further, 40% of the organizations in this category report consultants carrying out organizational analyses or evaluations, while only 20% of respondents in this category involve consultants in the development of guidelines (at the organizational level) or the provision of training. These findings are consistent with the overall picture that we have been painting so far. In particular, given that many of these organizations work with significant third-party funding, it is more often than not the donors that insist on independent external evaluations of the projects they have financed. Similarly, participating in competitive tenders increasingly requires assembling highly specialized teams that can address ever more demanding donor requirements when it comes to ME&L systems. As donors themselves are under increasing pressure to show results through more complex templates and frameworks, contractors are expected to satisfy a number of ME&L criteria that very few organizations can provide using just their existing staff capacities (in terms of technical and/or time availability). Here, one should note that programme managers tend to already have rather full agendas with their own project management obligations.

Notably, external consultants have a much more limited role in training activities and functions that are linked to the internalization of ME&L capacities. This highlights both the limitations of programme management centred approaches

to ME&L (as described above) and also the need for organizations to find ways to maximize the impact of external support in the short-term, particularly where the role of the consultant is to cover organizational gaps at the technical level or to fill a function that has been contracted out. In organizations with specific ME&L profiles, independent consultants seem to be mostly involved in the programme development cycle (80% of respondents in this category mentioned this function). They also support monitoring efforts (60%) and provide training (60%). Further, 40% of the respondents in this category said their organization involved consultants in the evaluation cycle at either the organizational or the programme level.

Here we can observe a division of labour between the specialized individuals within the organization and the consultants whereby the former seem to be more focused on organizational aspects of ME&L and the consultants are essentially employed for programme-based activities across the programme development and ME&L cycles. Here, the role of the consultant is more one of working alongside the organization whereas, in those organizations without a specific ME&L function, it is more a case of externally carrying out a function or taking the place of an unavailable staff member in the performance of certain functions.

Training of staff plays a much more important role in organizations with a specific ME&L profile. Unlike in the case of organizations with programme-based ME&L systems, organizations with a specialized function have already taken decisive steps towards institutionalization and consequently the internalization of lessons learnt has become much more critical to the adequate functioning of their ME&L systems.

HOW ARE ME&L ACTIVITIES FUNDED?

/ FUNDING STRUCTURE

Respondents to the questionnaire are almost equally split between those who mainly use third-party funding (8 organizations) and those who primarily use core funding to finance ME&L activities (7 organizations), with four organizations reporting using significant amounts of both third-party and core funding.

There is an element of consistency between the ME&L funding structure and the overall orientation of the ME&L system. That is, organizations that mainly use third-party funding are consistently more programme-oriented when it comes to defining their ME&L systems: they do not have specialized staff and their ME&L priorities focus on responding to a programme's needs.

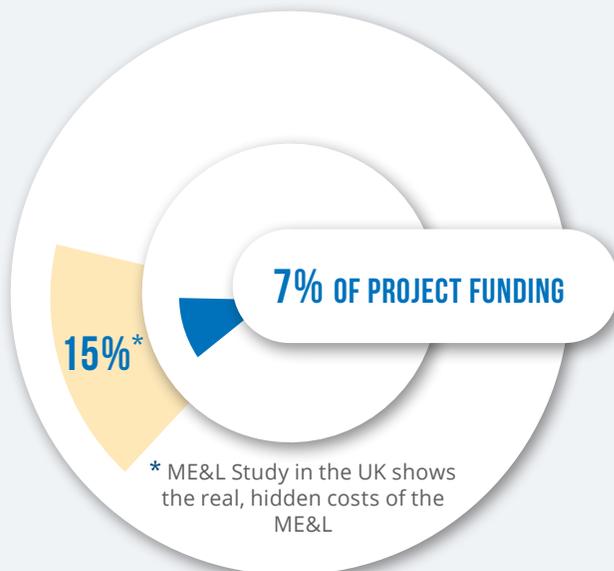
On the other hand, organizations that use core funding or a mix of both options present a somewhat more nuanced picture:

- Four of the seven organizations that primarily use core funding report having specialized personnel, of which two have specific units, for their ME&L activities, whereas the other three do not have a specialized ME&L function;
- Two of the four organizations using both core and third-party funding have specialized personnel (of which one has these constituted as a formal unit), whereas the other two do not have a specific ME&L function.

Unsurprisingly, the organizations with separate ME&L functions use some core funding to finance ME&L activities within the organization. The reason why some organizations without separate ME&L functions rely heavily on core funding for these activities is related to the overall funding structure of the organization (i.e. they are organizations that have only limited third-party funding). In those organizations that employ a mixed funding structure, the ones that do not have separate functions tend to develop programme-based ME&L systems where the funding complements more important third-party sources of funding.



ME&L FUNDING REPORTED VS HIDDEN COSTS



/ HOW MUCH IS SPENT ON ME&L?

The respondents consistently reported spending less than 7% of their total budget on funding, irrespective of whether they primarily use third-party or core funding. Only two organizations reported spending more, but neither more than 13% of their project funding on ME&L activities. We believe that these figures underestimate the total spend on ME&L related activities.

The reason for this is that estimates tend to overlook the “hidden” ME&L costs. That is, expenditure that by nature is more difficult to allocate to ME&L efforts but that does have an impact on the overall implementation of the ME&L system⁷.

Interestingly, the debate on the funding of ME&L served to characterize the level of an organization’s awareness of hidden ME&L costs and how they might eventually look at the possibility of having more precise systems to calculate the ME&L costs to the organization. Here, cost-effectiveness and value-for-money arguments were mixed with more normative views about the credibility of donor-funded projects.

First, it was argued that the cost of disentangling hidden ME&L costs is much higher than the value of such detailed information. Organizations generally tended to disagree with the idea that more precise costing could enhance the value of ME&L to the general functioning of the organization through increasing the accountability of ME&L outputs and allowing a more thorough value-for-money assessment on what was being done under the ME&L heading. That is, the costs the organization would need to incur to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the “real” ME&L costs were not justified.

Second, issues such as increasing transparency towards donors seemed to carry very little weight. Donors do not seem to be particularly concerned about having a comprehensive picture of costs beyond ensuring that the organization delivers on its M&E commitments and expected outputs.

Finally on this topic, an argument was put forward by VVSG based on the potential normative implications that fully accounting for ME&L costs could have on partners in the South in terms of the overall credibility of development cooperation funds. The argument was that ME&L costs (when covered by project funding) could be understood as funding that was being diverted from the main objective of supporting the processes of institutional change of partners in the South. Too much transparency about the nature and quantity of these costs could put the implementing organization in a difficult position with their partners as such costs could be perceived as excessive overheads, and self-centred rather than putting funding and energies to a common use.

⁷ A recent report addressing ME&L systems in NGOs in the UK showed that, when unpacked (i.e. more systematically including hidden costs), the average organizational level of ME&L spending was around 17.5% (cf. an initial estimate of 5% to 10% based on formal budget allocations). This rose to some 20% when considering the proportion of project-based funding going towards ME&L.

See: https://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/publications/Investing_in_MEL.pdf

TOOLS AND METHODS

/ MONITORING AND EVALUATION

When it comes to the use of different Monitoring and Evaluation tools, the results of the survey show little change from the results in the previous report⁸. Some changes can be observed for specific methodologies, which seem to have become better known and more widely used by members of the CIB Working Group (notably the Theory of Change, while Most Significant Change continues to be rarely used). Nevertheless, the Logical Framework remains the dominant methodology in the practices of the Working Group members (83% of respondents report using this methodology either always or often).

BUILDING A SHARED LEXICON

Another question is whether the above-mentioned methods are implemented consistently across all the members of the CIB Working Group. For example, can the results of case studies produced by the various members of the Working Group be compared, and are individual members consistent in their usage?

FCM's recent experience with the codification of their Knowledge Products (i.e. training guides, videos, policy papers, case studies, good practice documents, etc.) to make them more easily accessible is an interesting example of how important it can be for an organization to build a shared lexicon and toolbox when it comes to the implementation of ME&L methods.

At the beginning of the process (five years ago), knowledge products were scattered,

mostly unknown beyond the specific project that had developed them, and quite often these tools and products would end up lost somewhere on the organization's shared drive.

Today, the FCM Programs' Knowledge Toolbox is a fully clickable PDF document that provides direct access to a wide range of products developed with their partners. The guide is in English, French and Spanish; and there are resources in up to nine languages within the toolbox.

Its greatest value is that it provides the organization with a unique and unified reference for its knowledge resources and methodological documents, which should contribute to enhancing the consistent implementation of some of the organization's key knowledge products and enable further innovation.⁹

Some differences could be observed in the methods used that seemed to depend on whether organizations have specific ME&L functions. Organizations where programme managers are at the centre of ME&L implementation seem to use a slightly larger toolbox when it comes to Monitoring and Evaluation methods than organizations with stand-alone ME&L functions. The data are summarized in Table 2 below.

⁸ See: F.N. 2

⁹ <https://fcm.ca/Documents/programs/FCMI/knowledge-management/FCM-Programs-Knowledge-Toolbox.pdf>

Table 2 • Percentages of respondents who claim to always or often use certain M&E methods

METHOD	PROGRAMME/PROJECT- CENTRED	ME&L PROFILES/UNITS
Logical framework	83%	83%
Theory of change	75%	32%
Outcome mapping	58%	80%
Most Significant Change	36%	20%
Organizational change checklists	36%	40%
Case studies	100%	83%
Tracer studies	18%	0%
Client satisfaction	72%	67%

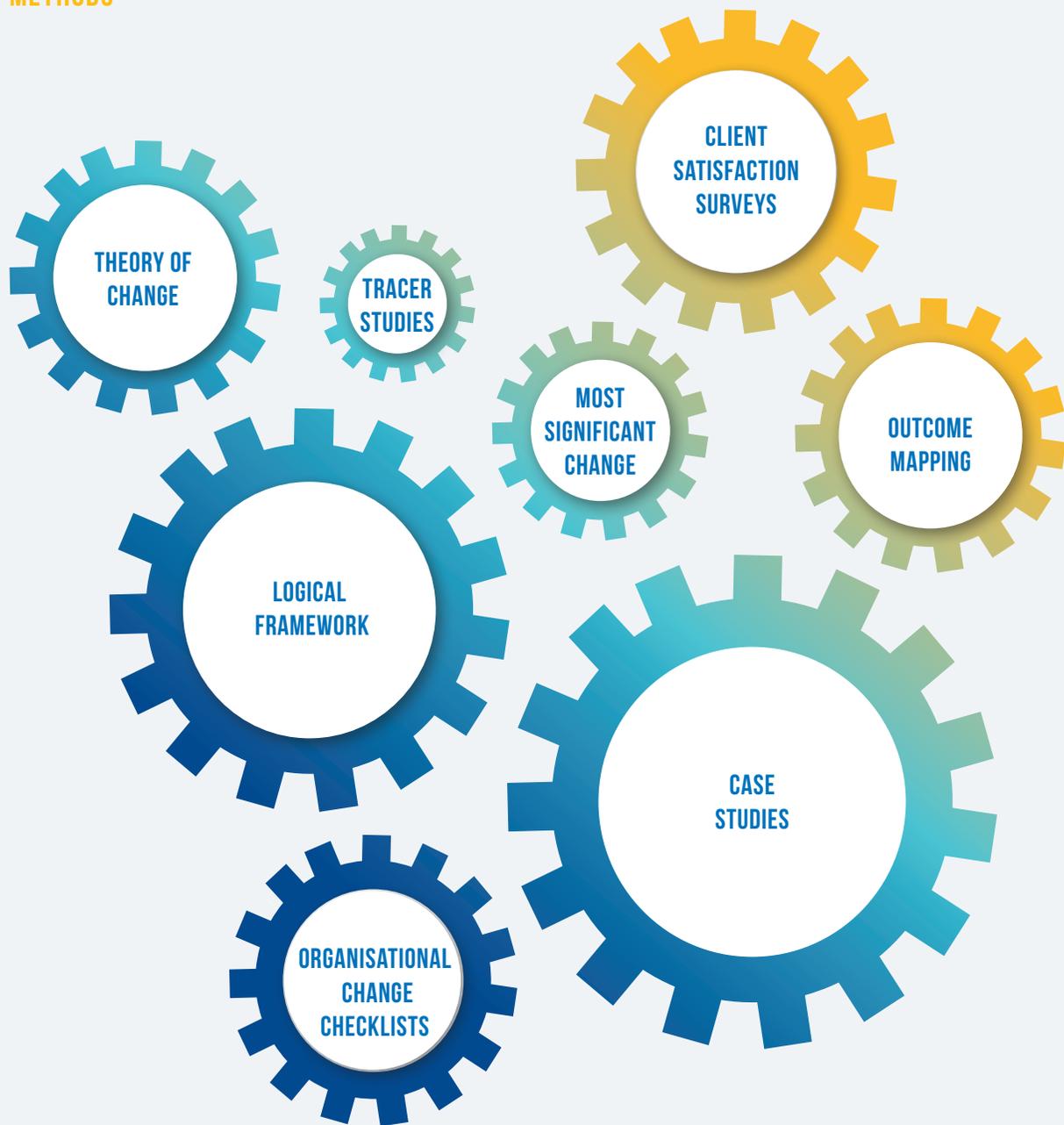
If we look at those methods that at least half of the respondents claim to be regularly using, we see that organizations where programme managers are responsible for ME&L have much more decisively embraced the Theory of Change approach than their counterparts with specialized functions. In fact, outcome mapping is the only widely used method where there is a significantly higher take-up among organizations with a specific ME&L function, and even here more than half the programme managers report using this approach regularly.

As noted earlier, one's programme orientation, and in particular reliance on third-party funding for ME&L purposes, exposes organizations to the requirements of donors. This can have negative consequences in terms of developing a consistent ME&L profile. However, a more positive and unintended consequence could be that it forces programme managers to stay abreast of donors' tools and work with a wider range of methods in order to address their requirements, and this

perhaps explains the figures in Table 2. This use of a broader range of tools should not be seen as an inherent advantage or disadvantage compared with the narrower use in organizations with specialized ME&L functions. A general characteristic of the ME&L systems in the organizations participating in this survey is that their systems have developed incrementally; evolving in parallel with perceived organizational needs and pressures. As such, a larger methodological lexicon should be seen as no more than the response to a more diverse set of organizational needs and pressures.



ME&L
TOOLS AND
METHODS



EXPANDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION LEXICON

VNG International's transition from their LGCP programme to their recently contracted IDEAL programme offers a good example of the positive impact that organizational adaptation to donor's requirements in the area of ME&L can have.

Both these programmes are funded by the Dutch Government and can be loosely defined as horizontal local government capacity development programmes. What is more, there is considerable continuity in terms of the issues covered by both programmes and the countries in which the programmes operate. At the same time, from an ME&L perspective, the two programmes are very different.

Whereas in LGCP, the Logical Framework and the 5C methodology were central to the ME&L architecture, in IDEAL the Theory of Change has played a critical role in defining the programme's M&E methodology (including its indicators) and is complemented by the Most Significant Change Method, with the 5C methodology being substantially adapted to serve a broader and more ambitious programme impact.

This change stems from a combination of factors. First, there is a different ministerial department responsible, which has determined a change in the focus of the expected outcomes and impact of the programme. Whereas LGCP's philosophy was more developmental, IDEAL's intervention philosophy is anchored in a fragility framework.

Second, whereas LGCP put capacity development at the centre, IDEAL was formulated with broader objectives such as the legitimization of local authorities and the establishment of an enabling environment for local governance at the core of its intervention methodology.

Third, VNG International's country managers have been through a learning process concerning the usefulness and overall applicability of certain tools (e.g. the 5C methodology) and the value of the Logical Framework during the LGCP implementation phase and understand the need to evolve this framework to fit the needs of the new programme and the lessons learnt from LGCP.

This necessary process of adaptation has seen programme managers dominating the discussions on the various methods and tools for project design, monitoring and evaluation, and therefore expanding the panoply of tools that the organization is in a position to use and adopt in all its programmes.

/ LEARNING

In previous sections of this report, we looked into the general motivations for ME&L systems. The results of the survey showed, first, how learning aims were given less priority than the monitoring and evaluation purposes of ME&L systems. Second, the survey saw how organizations with a more programme/project-based profile generally tended to favour staff development over knowledge generation (although both aspects were ranked close to each other in terms of importance), whereas several of the organizations with a more comprehensive or organization-focused approach to ME&L would prioritize knowledge generation over staff capacity development.

THE FLUID CONTOURS OF LEARNING

There is a porous border between the organizational dimension of learning and learning processes understood as part of the mandate of the CIB Working Group members. As a result, learning tools can have an impact beyond the immediate level of the organizational learning processes or the ME&L systems that they serve. A good example is that of benchmarking.

Benchmarking has become a common feature in organizational change and capacity development programmes. It establishes thresholds against which the capacities, performance and/or progress of a specific organization (and therefore the impact of capacity development programmes) can be measured (the actual purpose of M&E systems).

Nevertheless, in the practices of the members of the CIB Working Group, benchmarking has, through different forms of stakeholder participation and involvement, evolved into an empowering and rich tool. As a result, it has come to play a significant role in some of the members programming, not only by providing a reference to understand and measure progress, but more importantly as a tool to enhance peer-learning and sustainable knowledge generating processes, and as a mechanism for confidence-building amongst stakeholders and

For this report, we also thought it would be valuable to look at the learning practices in members of the CIB Working Group beyond the general purposes of ME&L. More specifically, this survey has tried to chart the nature of the learning process, the main areas of an organization's functioning where learning is expected to have an impact, and some of the main modalities and methods employed for learning.

This is an aspect that was not covered in the previous report. Overall, the idea was to see to what extent organizations are developing learning strategies, alongside their Monitoring and Evaluation systems, and what are the main features of these policies.

strengthening ownership in complex institutional and policy-reform processes.

This is the case with KS's Efficiency Network methodology, which was originally developed to support Norwegian municipalities' efforts to enhance the quality of service delivery through improving their access to evidence (data) and to the practices of leading players in specific issue areas, and is now actively used in the Association's programmes in other countries (notably Ukraine).

The multidimensionality of learning and knowledge-generation tools speaks volumes of the complex ways in which the notion of learning actually cuts across all levels of organizational activity: not only as an organizational process, but also as a key identity marker of an organization's activities; not only as a tool for understanding progress, but also as a mechanism for generating sustainability and a strong sense of ownership.

However, maximizing the value added by such complex processes requires good organizational learning systems in order to anchor knowledge generation in actual practices beyond the individual experience of specific programmes. This is an aspect where most organizations acknowledge the need for additional work.

/ LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In recent years, learning has become a critical aspect of organizational development. Organizations are expected to “learn” as a way to ensure that they keep up with increasingly challenging operational environments. In private sector organizations, learning is intrinsically linked to enhancing competitiveness. In public sector organizations, learning has been connected to enhancing the very public ethos of the organization and the public accountability cycle. In this context, learning is critical to ensuring that citizens are served in the best possible way and that limited public resources are used in the most effective manner.

In this sense, it is not surprising that, generally, organizations taking part in our survey report their learning processes as being structured on both the programme and the organizational levels (50% of the respondents) or through ad-hoc initiatives occurring on both the project and the

organizational levels (33%). It is noteworthy that these findings are consistent across the different ME&L approaches we have seen (existence or not of dedicated ME&L staff – third-party or core financing of ME&L systems). This suggests that perhaps learning is treated as a somewhat separate set of processes, linked to the M&E system of the organization but developing and evolving on a separate track.

At the same time, most of the organizations participating in the CIB Working Group Meeting in South Africa acknowledged that their learning systems are more of an expression of an emerging area of organizational development than a consolidated set of policies and procedures that actually inform organizational practices in an integrated fashion across all levels of activity. Being as it may, the research highlights important aspects that could further determine the shape of future, better integrated and more sophisticated policies. Thus, it is relevant to look into some of their main characteristics.

Table 3 • Learning objectives ranked by organizational development area

RANKING	ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AREAS	SCORE ⁹
1	Improve strategic capabilities of the organization	3.72
2	Facilitate knowledge sharing	3.33
3=	Enhance cooperation and collaboration within the organization	2.83
3=	Capture and organize knowledge	2.83
5	Improve management processes	2.28

⁹ For an explanation of how the scores were calculated see F.N. 6.

As the table above shows, most of the organizations prioritize the development of strategic capabilities over other potential priority areas. Knowledge sharing within the organization was put in second place, followed by enhancing cooperation and collaboration and capturing and by organizing knowledge. Improving management procedures was put in last place despite being a traditional target area for learning processes. This list of preferences reflects the areas needing attention to boost the more programme-oriented ME&L systems (as seen in the majority of our responding organizations).

As noted earlier, one of the potential pitfalls of programme-centred ME&L systems is that they can promote a silo culture of learning. The survey indicates that organizations are aware of the potential negative impacts of this dynamic, and try to use learning process and tools to counteract this (for example by enhancing cross-team exchanges and information sharing through workshops and seminars).

In the organizations with dedicated ME&L functions, strategic development was again the top priority, but capturing and organizing knowledge was seen as having greater importance (equal second place – together with knowledge sharing – with a score of 3.33) than by their programme-based counterparts, with the importance of enhancing cooperation and collaboration remaining unchanged (2.83).

This is consistent with the idea of an ME&L system, which, as we have already seen, favours systemic or organizational aspects of the functioning of an organization and points these organizations towards a more knowledge-based model (at least when it comes to their ME&L systems). In other words, one could argue that organizations favour those priority areas that could contribute to the development of systematized knowledge in order to address the very information needs of a ME&L system that transcend the specificities of individual programme activities in order to look into more systemic aspects of the functioning of the organization.

As already emphasized, these slight variations between the learning priorities of our respondents should not be interpreted as a normative scale of good – bad or better – worst. Rather, the fact that learning priorities are consistent with the general ME&L profiles that we have identified reflects a consistency between organizational needs and the architecture of the ME&L systems adopted.

/ LEARNING TOOLS USED

We further investigated which tools and methods organizations use to promote learning. We were interested to discover whether the policies were as systematic as claimed, and consistent with the declared priorities of their learning policies. Our questionnaire sought answers to these questions by asking respondents to “blindly” assess a list of commonly used learning methods. As reflected in Table 4 below, the literature attaches specific methods to specific areas of organizational development. The respondents were not provided with this information and by analysing their answers we could investigate how systematic and consistent their learning processes were with their declared priorities.

Table 4 • Most commonly used tools by area of organizational development (aggregated results)

AREA / TOOLS	% REPORTING USE (ADJUSTED)	RANKING BY USE	OVERALL RANKING
STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT			
Outcome Mapping	63%	1	3
Social Network Analysis	47%	2	6
Most Significant Change (MSC)	31%	3	8
MANAGEMENT			
Activity-based Knowledge Mapping	42%	1	7
Blame vs Gain Behaviours	10.5%	2	9
Force Field Analysis	10.5%	2	9
COLLABORATION			
Communities of Practice	74%	1	1
Mind Maps	68%	2	2
Teams: Virtual and Face-to-Face	58%	3	4
KNOWLEDGE SHARING			
Peer Assists	58%	1	4
After Action Reviews and Retrospect	53%	2	5
Intranet Strategies	47%	3	6
Email Guidelines	42%	4	7
CAPTURING AND STORING KNOWLEDGE			
Shared Network Drives	74%	1	1
Taxonomies for Documents and Folders	63%	2	3
Staff Profile Pages	47%	3	6
Blogs	47%	3	6
Exit Interviews	42%	4	7

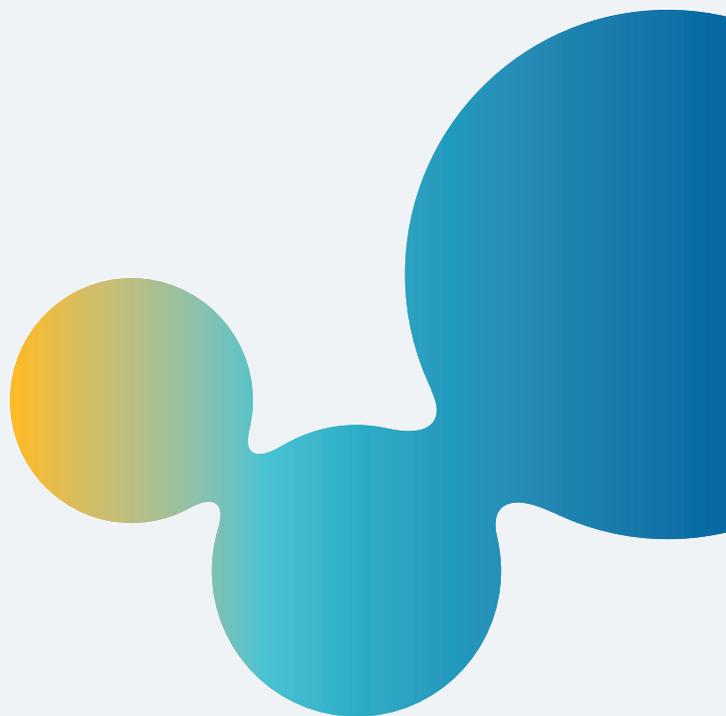
Less specifically, most organizations seem to be similarly aware (irrespective of whether they use them or not) of the tools in the areas of knowledge capture (82% knew at least one of the tools listed), knowledge sharing (80%), strategy development (80%) and collaboration (78%). However, only 46% of respondents appeared to be aware of any of the tools listed for improving management processes.

Of the means for enhancing the overall strategic profile of an organization, the table above shows that outcome mapping is the one our respondents are most likely to use (63%). Similarly, of the approaches to support improvements in management processes, the respondents are most likely to use activity-based knowledge mapping (42%); and of those to enhance collaboration, the establishment of communities of practice was the most used (74%). Of the methods that are seen as fostering knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer assistance was the most commonly used (58%); and, finally, of the methods that the literature sees as valuable for capturing, storing and organizing knowledge, our respondents most often focussed on developing shared network drives (74%).

/ MATCHING TOOLS AND OBJECTIVES

In interpreting the significance of these data, one needs to compare the tools that organizations say they use with their declared organizational priorities. For example, an organization that stated its top priority was enhancing collaborative work but did not report using any of the three tools listed in Table 4 under 'collaboration' even if it is enhancing collaboration, is clearly doing so in a less systematic way than an organization with a similar priority that reports using the specific tools in this area. Similarly, an organization where enhancing collaboration is its top priority but whose learning toolbox focuses on other areas of organizational development will have a much less consistent approach to learning than one whose tools and priorities are aligned.

In order to assess this we viewed the answers to the questions related to tools used alongside an



organization's claimed top priority in terms of a learning strategy.

Overall, in terms of systematization and consistency, the learning strategies of most organizations seem to be systematic and consistent with their learning objectives (i.e. using relevant tools for the right purposes).

Organizations that prioritized strategic development employed a more diverse toolbox linked to this area of organizational development than organizations where this had a lower priority. Both network analysis and outcome mapping were widely used (62.5% of respondents in this category reported using these tools). Similarly, looking at other areas of organizational development, some of the most widely used tools are those that can have a broader impact on strategy development, such as activity-based knowledge mapping (75%) or mind maps (62.5%), the latter being fundamentally a tool for collaborative strategic thinking.

Similarly, organizations prioritizing collaboration, all declared that using communities of practice and using teams (100%) as their main learning tools. Organizations prioritizing knowledge sharing reported well-above average use of all the knowledge-sharing tools in the list above (75%) This use was complemented with the wide use of collaborative strategies (all of them use communities of practice or mind mapping exercises). This would point towards organizations in this category seeing knowledge sharing and collaboration as two sides of the same process. This is complemented by the wide use of some knowledge generation, storing and organization tools such as blogs (100%) or shared network drives (100%).

Finally, organizations that prioritize either knowledge organization or management reform seem to be less consistent and systematic in their learning approaches. These organizations report only a limited use of the relevant tools, and more widely use tools linked to other areas of development.

The reason for this may be related to the very characteristics of these two areas of organizational development and how they are perceived by the organizations taking part in this study. As already mentioned, organizational learning can occur on many levels, some more structured than others. These two areas of organizational development in particular are so central to the functioning of any organization that they tend to be mainstreamed throughout other more-specific learning objectives, without necessarily being addressed directly through specific methodologies. For example, improving management systems is a constant struggle in organizations, but the "learning tools" to advance this process may not be connected to specific learning methods, but to other processes such as internal performance audits, internal evaluations or departmental reviews. Similarly, management reform objectives may be covered and/or advanced through other learning methods included in the questionnaire. For example, although 'communities of practice' is fundamentally a tool for fostering collaboration, they can also be used to foster managerial reform and change in organizations. Similar considerations could be applied to peer-assistance mechanisms.

As such, the fact that learning priorities and tools are not always perfectly in line in some of the organizations taking part in our survey should not be seen as questioning the overall value of the learning strategies reported by the respondents. Further, it opens up an interesting avenue for further research on actual learning processes in Local Governments and their Associations; one that was beyond the context of this report.





CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This document is an attempt to map some of the main characteristics of the ME&L systems used by the members of the CIB Working Group. This is a very diverse constituency and, consequently, their ME&L systems are also varied. Some organizations have very rich and complex systems while others keep ME&L very simple. Our research highlights two main types of systems: a programme-oriented ME&L in which ME&L activities revolve around and are channelled through the programme management structures; and a more organizationally oriented ME&L where organizations have partially decoupled ME&L activities from programme management and implementation in a way that it can also look at other aspects of the life of the organization. However, the distinction between these two models is not clear-cut, the results showed a continuum between these two extremes with organizations constantly trying to find ways to adjust their ME&L systems to their evolving needs. Given this reality, it is difficult to make specific recommendations that would be applicable to all members of the group on the organizational aspects analysed in this document. Similarly, the excellent recommendations provided in the previous report regarding the use of M&E tools and methods remain valid and do not need to be repeated here¹⁰.

/ INVOLVEMENT IN ME&L

One of the most interesting outcomes of this research has been to see how organizations seem to be engaged in a constant process of revision and adaptation of their own ME&L practices in a quest to better understand and communicate the real impact of their activities. This is important because it reflects the value that these organizations attach to their ME&L policies and systems.

A key recommendation for all the members of the working group is that they strengthen such processes of internal reflection in a way that can ultimately foster institutional innovation and enhance organizational capacities. As noted earlier, the only real way to assess ME&L systems is to evaluate their ability to satisfy organizational needs. As these evolve, so should the ME&L systems and the organization's expectations of them.

This process should be based on "structural" questions that transcend the distinctions between the various "models" identified above and, more importantly, which can help organizations articulate the transition between organizational models: How can we better characterize the impact of our work? How do we address the impacts that donors have on the way our organization looks at ME&L? How do we ensure that ME&L methods and systems are used in a consistent way that enables the accumulation, dissemination and comparison of knowledge?

¹⁰ See: F.N. 1

/ SELECTING ME&L TOOLS

At the same time, thinking about ME&L should not only be about the “big questions” but also about the more technical aspects of the functioning of ME&L systems. For example, aspects that are often overlooked are the technical implications of the methods and tools employed for ME&L and the extent to which we are using the right tools correctly and for the right purposes. The ongoing discussions on the merits of the Logical Framework is a good example of this. While this is one of the most widely used tools, most organizations remain dissatisfied with its outcomes. However, more often than not, criticisms stem from both the mismatch between practice and expectations and the inconsistent implementation of the methodology, rather than on the actual merits of the tool itself.

Similarly, when it comes to the selection of ME&L tools, this decision should be further integrated into the project design process so as to ensure consistency between what organizations want to achieve, and how that can actually be measured, and how the organization can learn from that process. ME&L should be considered an important part of a project’s methodological design because it has value right across the project management cycle. Unfortunately, organizations very often end up “choosing” methods which cannot do justice to the type of objectives they are trying to achieve or, even worse, for which they cannot generate relevant data, simply because the methods have become “fashionable” in the institutional communication of donors and implementers.

/ CRITICAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Although there is no evidence of specific misuses by members of the working group in this area, it is important to critically self-assess how specific methods and tools are being incorporated into the practices of our organizations in order to ensure that reflections on the quality of our ME&L systems are grounded on a clear understanding of where problems actually are.

Here, investing in analysis is clearly important; as well as ensuring that our project managers and ME&L experts are adequately equipped to make informed decisions about the use of specific tools and processes (particularly through targeted training and specific learning activities).

Finally, these questions (both technical and structural) constitute a common thread linking the experiences and thinking of the members of the working group around their ME&L policies. This can contribute towards setting a shared agenda for further dialogue and cooperation among the members of the Working Group around more qualitative aspects of their practices, which could then open the door to further knowledge sharing and cooperation.

/ CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development has to be connected to the ability to deliver in the context of broader processes of development and change. This creates an opportunity to more explicitly connect the capacity building agenda of local governments to the broader questions of our time. Whether this is about environmental sustainability, effective and inclusive democratic governance, human security, dialogue, peacebuilding, economic development or the management of migration flows, there is no area of the global agenda where local authorities do not play or are not expected to play a decisive role.

At the same time, this has raised expectations (often unreasonably) on what local capacity development programmes can actually achieve and has forced organizations to look more carefully at their own practices and impacts both in their own domestic practices and in their international cooperation activities.

The work of the CIB Working Group in this area can prove valuable because, as a platform, it can contribute to defining more clearly (at an aggregated level) the contributions that local governments and their associations can make to the realization of these agendas.

However, to fulfil this potential, may require the way in which the CIB Working Group can be instrumental in establishing a shared “agenda for change” for its members to be strengthened.

/ ROLES FOR THE CIB WORKING GROUP

POOLING KNOWLEDGE

Given that sharing experiences and knowledge are key tenets of the work of the CIB Working Group, moving forward in this direction requires addressing key qualitative aspects about how information can be collected and shared in a way that ensures comparability and that the knowledge generated becomes a driver for action and change. This is an area where the ME&L tools and methods used by the Working Group members is central.

For example, having a consistent approach to the identification and development of case studies could help the exchange process by generating knowledge that can actually be shared and compared and, therefore, acted upon across and within the member organizations. This could also contribute to enhanced, better-informed cooperation between organizations on the ground and cross-fertilization between organizations leading to more diverse sources of knowledge being used by CIB Working Group members in their work.

This, in turn, could reinforce the potential of the CIB Working Group to become a platform where a shared “agenda for change” can be further defined and where the impacts of such an agenda can be clearly identified. Further, this wealth of knowledge could be used to establish a more effective dialogue on ME&L systems with donors.

DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE

Similarly, progressively establishing common definitions and identifying good practices would allow the members of the working group to define shared methodological standards to which they can relate their own practices and, moreover, this would provide a sound basis for a more informed dialogue with donors on the value of certain ME&L methodologies and how these could be improved.

A shared qualitative assessment of the practices of members of the Working Group in using

certain tools and methodologies could provide valuable inputs to the broader discussion among all stakeholders in development relationships as to what is the best way to assess progress and change. Moreover, it could inform internal processes of reform and change, and thus reinforce the incentives for positive change.

On the basis of such qualitative work, members will be able to identify needs and then devise mechanisms at the Working Group level to fulfil them, whether in the form of facilitating specific exchanges and support between members or by mobilizing the resources of the CIB Working Group as a whole.

This could translate, for example, into the development of off-the-shelf guides for the use of certain tools and methods, and the articulation of a repository of shared ME&L resources that are adapted to the unique features of the work of local governments and their associations in the field of international cooperation. These could include shared sets of indicators for measuring outputs, outcomes and the impact of cooperation programmes in different areas, which could then be used as a complementary reference by all the members in their international cooperation work.

By acting as a collective space for a more qualitative discussion on ME&L, the CIB Working Group will contribute to the ongoing dialogue within its member organizations as to how ME&L systems can be further improved and developed.

INVOLVING DONORS

Ultimately, all parties in an international cooperation framework are united in their commitment to delivering effective processes of change (in particular under the SDGs). A more structured multi-stakeholder dialogue around ME&L practices, where mutual learning is a key element, could be a good start towards meeting this shared objective.

What is more, members of the Working Group seem to have had positive experiences where such dialogue has occurred, and this can be shared and capitalized upon.

The CIB Working Group can be instrumental in this process by ensuring that a set of common objectives and expectations regarding the outcomes of that dialogue are defined. It can also play a valuable role in helping coordination and information sharing across the dialogue between its members and their respective donors, but also in facilitating the elaboration of common positions based on its identification of good practice and the capitalization of the Working Group's role as a reflection space through targeted communications addressed to a multiplicity of multilateral and bilateral players.

/ RECOMMENDATIONS

AT THE MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

- ME&L systems should evolve to reflect changing organizational needs. Members of the working group should maintain an internal dialogue about the quality and impact of their ME&L systems as part of the ongoing conversation about the value of the work that organizations do;
- This reflection should look at structural questions and be grounded on a self-critical assessment of the technical aspects of the organization's practices. Here, ensuring that programme managers and experts are equipped with the right tools and knowledge to carry out this reflection is of utmost importance.

AT THE WORKING GROUP LEVEL

- The CIB Working Group should help members connect the reform processes of their own ME&L systems to the core of the discussions and exchanges that take place at the Working Group level.
- By promoting a more consistent use of ME&L methodologies across all members, the Working Group will help to ensure the success of key qualitative aspects of the experience sharing and codification process that lies at the

core of the methods used and the overall value of the working group. Here, addressing key aspects of how information can be collected and shared in a way that ensures results are comparable is critical.

- To advance this process, consistent definitions could usefully be elaborated for those methods and tools most widely used by the members of the Working Group, such as case studies and a preferred method for the identification of good and best practices, since these are the most likely to be seen in the practices of the wider membership. This could take the form of developing off-the-shelf guides on the use of certain tools and methods and the articulation of a repository of shared ME&L resources that are adapted to the specifics of the work of local governments and their associations in the field of international cooperation (for example shared sets of indicators for measuring outputs, outcomes and the impact of cooperation programmes in different areas). These could then be used as references by all members in their international cooperation work.
- Similarly, devising mechanisms to enhance peer cooperation could help ensure that these tools are consistently used and contribute to helping the members of the working group advance along a more consistent path. This could take the form of regular training sessions and peer exchanges on specific ME&L tools or processes, and directly involve those responsible within the organizations;
- Finally, the CIB Working Group should take a more decisive role in coordinating and information sharing in the process of dialogue with international donors. This could be achieved by facilitating the elaboration of common positions based on the identification of good practice. It could also be achieved, by capitalizing on the role of the Working Group as a reflection space, through the production of targeted communication products addressed to a multiplicity of multilateral and bilateral players.



ANNEX: METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This report is written on the basis of the analysis of survey data, interviews and a group discussion of the preliminary results for this report organized during the 2017 annual CIB Working Group meeting, which took place in South Africa between the 26th and the 28th of September 2017. Survey data were collected between July and September 2017, and offered interesting insights into the practices of members of CIB Working Group. The data have been used to identify major trends among respondents in the way they organize and manage their ME&L systems. The survey included 22 questions covering the following areas:

- The roles and objectives of ME&L;
- How ME&L is organized;
- How ME&L is funded;
- The main Monitoring and Evaluation tools and methods used;
- How Learning process are structured.

/SAMPLE

The survey was completed by 19 organizations. This represents approximately 35% of the total membership of the Capacity and Institution Building Working Group of UCLG. The respondents came from a wide variety of organizations that look at ME&L in diverse ways. It is also worth noting that the respondents were generally among the most active members of the Working Group.

While, from a purely statistical standpoint, the response rate is probably slightly lower than would have been desirable in terms of representativeness, the sample does cover a wide spectrum of Working Group Members.

As presented below (see attached list of respondents), the respondents come from both the Global North and the Global South. Organizations from North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa responded to the questionnaire. Similarly, the respondents include organizations at both ends of the development aid relationship. From an organizational perspective, the sample covers organizations with large operational budgets for capacity development as well as organizations with relatively small budgets. Similarly, the sample includes organizations with a pronounced international cooperation profile alongside organizations whose fundamental operational remit remains bounded by their domestic constituency.

As such, the outcomes of this research can be seen as representative of the practices of the members of the working group and the findings have been accepted as such by the members of the working group.

/ DATA QUALITY

In terms of the quality of the data provided by the organizations, it should be noted that the distribution of respondents' roles within their organizations matches the overall trends in terms of how ME&L is structured in the surveyed participants. That is, those organizations that do have specialized units or functions devoted to ME&L, have generally involved their related staff members in completing the questionnaire; whereas those organizations where programme managers are responsible for ME&L have consistently involved them in providing responses.

Each organization's responses to the questionnaire have been internally consistent across all the dimensions of the questionnaire, resulting in coherent organizational profiles.

Finally, the trends identified are consistent with general ME&L practices in other governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of international cooperation and capacity building.

/ TRIANGULATION

The data gathered during the survey were checked for reliability through informal, unstructured interviews with some of the respondents. These interviews served the purpose of clarifying some of their responses to the questionnaire and gaining deeper insight into some of the respondents' practices and policies. This activity served as preparation for the group discussion of the preliminary results, which took place on September 28th 2017 as part of the CIB Working Group's annual meeting.

This session enabled the author to test first-hand the main conclusions of the report, while collecting additional information on the practices and the challenges faced by some of the participants at the Working Group's annual meeting (most of the survey respondents were present). The outcomes of that session have been used to add nuance to some the results from the survey as well as to address in a more discursive manner some issues that could not be adequately tackled through a questionnaire. A notable example of this is the discussion that ensued on financing ME&L.



/ LIST OF RESPONDENTS

ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY
Alianza Euro Latinoamericana de Cooperación entre Ciudades	REGIONAL – LATIN AMERICA
Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities	BELGIUM
Barcelona City Council	SPAIN
Barcelona Provincial Council	SPAIN
eThekweni Municipality	SOUTH AFRICA
Federación Colombiana de Municipios	COLOMBIA
Federation of Canadian Municipalities	CANADA
Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities	SRI LANKA
German Association of Cities	GERMANY
Government of Catalunya - DG Development Cooperation	SPAIN
Local Government Association of England and Wales	UNITED KINGDOM
Local Government Denmark	DENMARK
National Confederation of Municipalities	BRAZIL
National Front of Mayors	BRAZIL
South African Local Government Association	SOUTH AFRICA
Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions	SWEDEN
The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities	NORWAY
Union of Turkish Municipalities	TURKEY
VNG International	NETHERLANDS

/ LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE CIB WORKING GROUP

AFRICA

UCLG Africa

Burkina Faso	Association of Municipalities of Burkina Faso (AMBF)
Kenya	Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya (ALGAK)
Mauritania	Urban Community of Nouakchott
Mali	Association of Municipalities of Mali (AMM)
Tanzania	Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania (ALAT)
South Africa	Municipality of eThekweni
	South African Local Government Association (SALGA)

ASIA

UCLG Asia Pacific

Cambodia	National League of Communes/Sangkats (NLC/S)
Nepal	Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDCN)
Nepal	Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN)
Pakistan	Local Councils Association of the Punjab (LCAP)
Sri Lanka	Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities (FSLGA)

EUROPE

Council of the European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

Belgium	Union of Cities and Communes of Wallonia (UVCW) Association of the city and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (AVCB) Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)
Denmark	Local Government Denmark (LGDK)
Finland	Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA)
France	Cités Unies France (CUF) City of Lyon
Germany	German Cities Association (DST)
Italy	European Association of Communes, Provinces and Regions (AICCRE)
Netherlands	VNG International (<i>Chair</i>)
Norway	Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)
Spain	Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) City Council of Barcelona Provincial Council of Barcelona Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)
Sweden	International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) SKL International Development Agency (SKL International) Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)
United Kingdom	Local Government Association (LGA)

LATIN AMERICA

Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations (FLACMA)

Argentina	City of Buenos Aires
Bolivia	Federation of Associations of Municipalities (FAM)
Brazil	National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) National Front of Prefects (FNP)
Chile	Chilean Association of Municipalities
Colombia	Federation of Colombian Municipalities (FCM) Agency of International Cooperation and Investment, City of Medellin (ACI)
Ecuador	Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities (AME)
Mexico	Association of Municipalities of Mexico (AMMAC) National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico AC (FENAMM) Mexico City

MIDDLE EAST AND WEST ASIA

UCLG Middle East and West Asia

Turkey	Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT)
Palestinian Authority	Association of Palestine Local Authorities (APLA)

NORTH AMERICA

Canada	Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) (<i>Vice-Chair</i>)
United States of America	National League of Cities

OBSERVERS

Association of International Francophone Mayors (AIMF)
Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)
International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
PLATFORMA

/ ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. *On behalf of which organization do you fill in this questionnaire?*

Organization

Contact person

Position

Email

2. *Could you please indicate the number of employees (not external consultants) in your organization directly working on international cooperation?*

A. *Less than 10*

B. *Between 10 and 20*

C. *Between 21 and 40*

D. *Between 41 and 80*

E. *More than 80*

3. *Could you please indicate the overall annual budget for managing development cooperation operations in your organization (please note that this includes both core and third party funding)?*

A. *Less than 10 million US\$*

B. *Between 10 and 20 million US\$*

C. *Between 20 and 40 million US\$*

D. *Between 40 and 80 million US\$*

E. *Between 80 and 160 million US\$*

F. *More than 160 million US\$*

4. *For what types of initiatives do you use Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (ME&L) (mark as necessary)?*

A. *We don't implement ME&L activities;*

B. *For the activities and services provided for by your organization (development cooperation programmes excluded);*

C. *In the context of development cooperation programmes in/with third countries;*

D. *As part of your organization's corporate development strategy/process;*

E. *Other.*

5. *Generally, in your organization... (mark the statement that better reflects the current situation)*

A. *ME&L activities are carried out consistently and systematically;*

B. *ME&L activities are carried out on specific areas of activity of the organization but not at all levels of activity;*

- C. *ME&L activities are rarely implemented and mostly to comply with the requirements of external partners/interlocutors on a case by case basis;*
- D. *ME&L activities are not really being implemented in our organization.*

6. *Does your organization have Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning guidelines?*

- A. *Yes, we have general guidelines at the level of the organization and specific guidelines at the level of the projects we implement for Monitoring, Evaluation and learning;*
- B. *Yes, we have general guidelines at the level of the organization and specific guidelines at the level of the projects we implement for Monitoring, Evaluation but not for learning;*
- C. *Yes we have guidelines for Monitoring, Evaluation and learning, but only at the level of the projects we implement for third parties;*
- D. *Yes we have guidelines for Monitoring and Evaluation (not for learning) but only at the level of the projects we implement for third parties;*
- E. *No, we don't have guidelines.*

7. *Does your organization currently have permanent staff assigned to ME&L?*

- A. *No*
- B. *Yes*
- C. *If yes, how many?*
- D. *If no, could you indicate who's responsible for ME&L in your organization?*

8. *Is your ME&L staff structured as a horizontal unit/separate profile in your organogram?*

- A. *Yes;*
- B. *No;*
- C. *If no, explain how are they structured.*

9. *Which kind of responsibilities does your ME&L staff (or your staff dealing with ME&L) mainly have (mark as many as necessary)?*

- A. *They elaborate terms of reference for external consultants and evaluators;*
- B. *They contribute to the development of programme / project proposals and initiatives (for example by developing the Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines and protocols, identifying output – outcome and impact indicators, etc.);*
- C. *They support programme managers by providing training and advice on specific methodological / technical aspects related to ME&L;*
- D. *They are responsible for the implementation of Monitoring / Evaluation activities within our programmes/projects;*
- E. *They are responsible for conducting regular Monitoring and Evaluation activities regarding the functioning and overall development of the organization;*

- F.** *They are responsible for developing, implementing and updating the organizational guidelines on ME&L;*
- G.** *They are responsible for fostering innovation within the organization and incorporating new techniques and methodologies as a result of peer exchanges and cooperation with other organizations;*
- H.** *They are responsible for the codification, storing and transmission of lessons learned within the organization;*

10. *Do you involve external consultants in supporting your ME&L activities within your organization?*

- A.** *Yes*
- B.** *No*

10 BIS. *If yes, in which roles do they mainly perform (mark as many as necessary)?*

- A.** *They help us to develop our project proposals and initiatives and notably programme / project based Monitoring and Evaluation systems;*
- B.** *They help us to carry out the actual Monitoring of our project activities;*
- C.** *They help us by carrying out external independent Evaluations and assessments of our programmes / projects*
- D.** *They help us with the development of Monitoring, Evaluation and learning guidelines at the organizational level (for example through facilitation or the development of guidelines);*
- E.** *They help us by providing training on ME&L aspects to our programme management staff;*
- F.** *They help us by carrying out external independent assessments/Evaluations of the functioning of our organization;*

11. *How is ME&L financed in your organization?*

- A.** *Mostly through third party project/programme funding;*
- B.** *Mostly through core organizational budget;*
- C.** *Both through third party and core budget.*

11 BIS. *If a) how much is devoted to ME&L activities on average as a % of your project funding?*

11 BIS. *If b) how much is annual budget of the organization for ME&L as a % of your total budget;*

11 BIS. *If c) what's on average your annual ME&L budget and how are costs distributed between the core budget and the third party funding;*

12. *What are the main purposes of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning within your organization (please rank in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 8 least important)?*

- A.** *Complying with external donors reporting requirements at the project/programme level;*
- B.** *Tracking project/programme's progress in order to make informed decisions about the project/programme implementation;*
- C.** *Understanding our performance as an organization when implementing development programmes/projects and extracting lessons learned for new initiatives;*
- D.** *Assessing and understanding the general performance of the organization and improving management systems, organizational structuring and the quality of our procedures;*
- E.** *Collecting information and building data sets that can be used in further development initiatives of the organizations (or as part of advocacy platforms/initiatives);*
- F.** *Developing fact-based communication products (fact-sheet, videos, etc.), which highlight the effectiveness of our work and support our fundraising efforts;*
- G.** *Facilitating the professional development of the staff and providing them with better tools and techniques for improving their functions;*
- H.** *Enhancing the transparency of our organization vis-à-vis our stakeholders (at the project level but also at the organizational level);*

13. *Which M&E methodologies does your organization currently use when Monitoring capacity development interventions?*

	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SELDOM	NEVER	I DON'T KNOW THIS TOOL
<i>The indicators of the Logical Framework</i>					
<i>Theory of Change</i>					
<i>Outcome Mapping</i>					
<i>Most Significant Change (MSC)</i>					
<i>Organizational Change Checklist</i>					
<i>Case studies</i>					
<i>Tracer Studies</i>					
<i>Client Satisfaction</i>					
<i>Other: please specify</i>					

14. *Does your organization carry out external independent Evaluations (beyond the requirements established by donors or other third parties)?*

- A.** *No;*
- B.** *Yes;*
- C.** *If yes, can you provide an example?*

15. *What are the main purposes of these additional external independent Evaluations (please rank in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 7 least important)?*

- A. Tracking project/programme's progress in order to make informed decisions about the project/programme implementation;*
- B. Understanding our performance as an organization when implementing development programmes/projects and extracting lessons learned for new initiatives;*
- C. Assessing and understanding the general performance of the organization and improving management systems, organizational structuring and the quality of our procedures;*
- D. Collecting information that can be used in further development initiatives of the organizations (or as part of advocacy platforms/initiatives);*
- E. Developing fact-based communication products (fact-sheet, videos, etc.), which highlight the effectiveness of our work and support our fundraising efforts;*
- F. Facilitating the professional development of the staff;*
- G. Enhancing the transparency of our organization vis-à-vis our partners (at the project level but also at the organizational level);*

16. *When it comes to Learning, would you say that... (mark the one that better reflects the reality in your organization)*

- A. learning in my organization occurs through structured processes and tools, defined both at the organizational and the programme level;*
- B. learning in my organization occurs through structured processes and tools defined only at the programme level;*
- C. learning in my organization occurs through ad-hoc initiatives sometimes at the programme level, sometimes at the organizational level;*
- D. learning in my organization occurs through ad-hoc initiatives only at the project level;*

17. *In your organization Learning is mostly geared to (please rank in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 5 least important)*

- A. Improve the strategic capabilities of the organization;*
- B. Improve management processes;*
- C. As a tool to enhance cooperation and collaboration within the organization;*
- D. To facilitate knowledge sharing within the organization;*
- E. To ensure that knowledge is adequately captured, stored and organized within your organization.*

18. Are any of the following techniques/tools being employed in your organization (mark as necessary)?

	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW THIS TOOL
Strategy development			
Social Network Analysis			
Most Significant Change (MSC)			
Outcome Mapping			
Other, please specify			
Management			
Blame vs Gain behaviors			
Force Field Analysis			
Activity-based Knowledge Mapping			
Other, please specify			
Collaboration			
Teams: Virtual and Face-to-Face			
Communities of Practice			
Mind Maps			
Other, please specify			
Knowledge Sharing			
Stories (Most Significant Change)			
Peer Assists			
After Action Reviews and Retrospect			
Intranet Strategies			
Email Guidelines			
Other, please specify			
Capturing and storing knowledge			
Taxonomies for Documents and Folders			
Exit Interviews			
Staff Profile Pages			
Blogs			
Shared Network Drives			
Other, please specify			



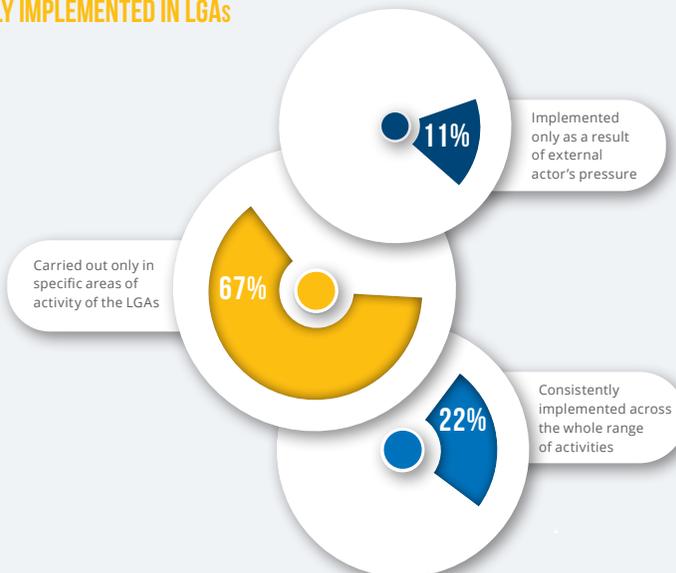
MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING CIB UCLG MEMBERS RESEARCH



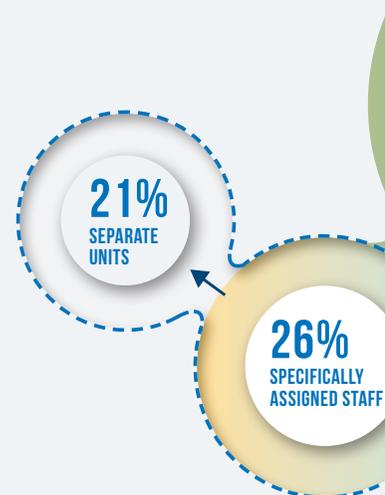
ME&L MAIN PURPOSES BY PRIORITIES



ME&L IMPLEMENTATION CONSISTENTLY IMPLEMENTED IN LGAs



ME&L INSIDE THE ORGANIZATION WHO DOES WHAT?



1-2

MONITORING

- Tracking project/programme's progress
- Complying with donors requirements

5-6-7

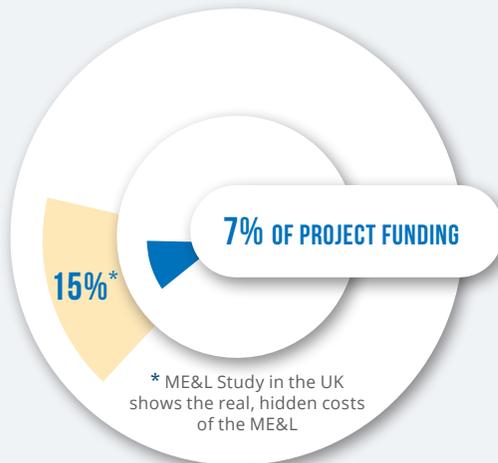
LEARNING AND TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency vis-a-vis stakeholders
- Collecting information and data-sets
- Facilitating the development of staff

74%
PROGRAMME
MANAGER'S JOB



ME&L FUNDING REPORTED VS HIDDEN COSTS



ME&L TOOLS AND METHODS

