



Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment

A JOINT CENTER OF COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL
AND THE EARTH INSTITUTE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MONITORING & EVALUATION: CHALLENGES FACING SUPPORT PROVIDERS

First Meeting of Negotiation Support Providers

October 8, 2015

Columbia Law School, New York

I. BACKGROUND

In October 2015, senior representatives from the major providers of technical assistance for large-scale projects and capacity-building trainings to governments gathered at Columbia Law School to discuss the challenges associated with the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of such support. Representatives of each of the support providers listed on www.NegotiationSupport.org were invited to attend.¹

This note provides a summary of the key issues raised during the discussion, with a view to facilitating a greater understanding of the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating technical assistance and trainings, and to what extent they could be tackled on a collaborative basis.

II. KEY CHALLENGES

1. *Diverse approaches to M&E*

Approaches to M&E are likely to differ in nature and scope depending on a variety of factors, including: (i) the type of technical assistance being provided (whether advisory, contract negotiation support, or capacity-building); (ii) the stage of the investment process at which assistance is being provided; and (iii) the duration of the engagement.

While the immediate output of technical assistance (such as the execution of an investment contract, or the delivery of a training with positive feedback) may be measurable, the isolated impact of the assistance, the quality of the service delivery, and the longer term impact of such assistance (or any longer term technical capacity building support), among other important factors, are exceedingly difficult to measure, particularly (but not only) in the short term. In such circumstances, support providers can find it difficult to effectively monitor, evaluate, and report on the extent to which their assistance has had an impact, in either direct or indirect terms, on a negotiation, legislative output, or capacity development.

2. *Management of information*

Support providers encounter political and legal barriers in seeking to utilize and share the information gained from M&E activities. The desire of support providers to maintain strong working relationships with recipient governments might militate against sharing information with other organizations regarding the influence of the technical assistance provided on national

¹ Please note that some of those invited were unable to attend: comments included in this document should not be attributed to all support providers listed on www.NegotiationSupport.org.

decision-making processes and outcomes. Participants also noted the legal challenges involved in utilizing this information where it is protected by attorney-client privilege (primarily an issue for direct contract negotiation support). While aggregating data may help to overcome these challenges to a certain extent, this process was highlighted as being time- and resource-intensive.

3. Development of indicators and measurement of outcomes

Identifying standardized, clear, and concise indicators that are reflective of the nuances involved in the provision and uptake of assistance, in addition to being capable of yielding the information required for M&E purposes, constitutes a significant challenge for support providers. This difficulty is often exacerbated where assistance provided by the organization seeking to monitor and evaluate their performance forms part of a larger framework of support for a particular project.

Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that both the quantitative and qualitative elements of advice are accounted for in evaluations of technical assistance. While quantitative elements may be more amenable to M&E, emphasizing measurable over less-measurable features of assistance may result in skewed incentives. Several participants expressed this concern specifically with regard to capturing social benefits.

4. Reporting and attribution

Identifying tangible outcomes that can be attributed to the assistance of support providers for reporting purposes is an on-going challenge. Highlighting at the outset the factors that could inhibit a successful project can help to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of the difficult circumstances in which assistance is being provided, in addition to the particular variables that may result in less-than-favorable (or unintended) outcomes. Dialogue and exchange between support providers and donors is thus crucial in this context. Adoption of the same approach with regard to the clients themselves is also likely to be worthwhile.

Participants also noted that engaging in M&E activities can require a significant investment in terms of both time and resources. It is important that this aspect be reflected in allocations of funding for particular projects.

5. Consistency of technical assistance

Increased consistency of technical assistance was referred to as a desired objective by several organizations that rely extensively on external consultants and lawyers. While exceptions were noted, these support providers face the challenge of identifying effective means of ensuring that the technical assistance being provided is: (i) consistent with assistance being provided on similar projects, and (ii) consistent with the standards that the support provider is committed to (in addition to global good practice, if defined).

III. COORDINATION AND EXCHANGE

While participants agreed that developing a cross-organizational M&E framework would be difficult to achieve in practice, and that maintaining internal standards and frameworks for the purposes of M&E at an organizational level was thus a more feasible approach, they also agreed that some increased coordination and institutional learning through shared experience would be beneficial.

Among the various means of coordination discussed by participants, increasing and maintaining dialogue among support providers regarding the common challenges they face was highlighted as a valuable next step. Specific means of increased coordination in the design and provision of trainings were also highlighted, including:

- Development of a **shared repository of training materials**; so as to: (i) make the development of curricula more efficient; (ii) increase the consistency of trainings and reduce the likelihood of confusion around key messages; and (iii) contribute to building the capacity of in-country trainers.
- Development of more effective means of **alumni engagement** to effectively build on the knowledge base of trainees.
- Sharing strategies for the development of more effective post-training **survey questions**.

IV. NEXT STEPS

Participants agreed that a second meeting of support providers would be useful in order to continue this productive dialogue. Participants suggested focusing on trainings during the next discussion, in addition to giving the discussion a geographical focus in order to understand the scope of the challenges highlighted during this session in the context of a specific case. CCSI will continue exchanging with participants to best tailor the topic to the needs of the support providers.