LESSONS ON ENGAGING LOCAL CONSTITUENTS IN ANALYSIS, REFLECTION AND LEARNING

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WHY COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS & LEARNING?

• An aspiration for inclusive and locally-owned evaluation processes
• Constituents as part of the sense-making and knowledge production
• But a continued struggle with operationalizing local ownership principles
  • Whose voices? Whose values? Whose language?
  • Whose interests? Interpretations? Agendas?
  • Who decides on what constitutes “result” and “impact”? 
• Backlash guided by “nothing about us without us”. “Evaluation/Research subjects” negotiating for control and ownership.
EVALUATIVE THINKING & FEEDBACK LOOPS

Frontline staff, local partners, community members and program participants -- “users” of data and information? Brokers? Co-creators of knowledge?

Rapid feedback and learning cycles require ability to think evaluatively and critically about what they do, see and hear.

– To question the assumptions that underpin interventions;
– To question the validity of assumptions and programmatic choices;
– To examine theories of change;
– To define with precision the meaning of “results”, “outcomes”, “impacts” and how to measure these.
ASPIRATION AND REALITY

Reality bites. Good process requires:

• Very thoughtful and skilled facilitation
• Self-awareness about power dynamics
• Elicitive techniques

Questioning, listening and analytical skills are often weak.

– Active listening skills
– Appreciative inquiry / Inductive inquiry
– Analytical skills (especially qualitative data analysis)
– Facilitation / dialogue skills
INSTITUTIONAL INCENTIVES & SUPPORT

Legitimate concern that a democratic/inclusive processes:
- How costly is this?
- How long does it take? Will it slow down program implementation cycle?
- Bring disagreement and contradictions into the process?
- Open “Pandora's box” of “issues beyond our control”?
- Perceptions of facipulation
WHAT IF WE DON’T DO IT AT ALL?

• Unmet aspirations and demands: local capacity, accountability, empowerment, program quality and meaningful engagement!

• Listening/feedback process is only first step. Joint analysis is a source of empowerment for staff, partners and engaged participants:
  • identification of patterns and trends
  • discussion of implications for on-going and future programming
  • action planning

• If we don’t make sense of information collected during monitoring, feedback and evaluation processes, and don’t use it, these processes can easily become extractive and unethical.
WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

• Connect evaluative processes with program design and re-design – meaningfully engage staff, partners, program participants

• Provide training for staff and partner organizations – individual and organizational level skill-building

• Institutional support: become better at listening, feedback, analysis -- demonstrate utility

• Support reflective practice – i.e. supervisor/staff, teams, organizations, partners