ENHANCING THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE FROM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Benefits of using information from monitoring and evaluation are multiple. The value of a monitoring and evaluation exercise is determined by the degree to which the information is used by intended decision makers and a wider audience. This chapter is intended to help UNDP managers, programme and project staff, M&E specialists, and communications officers in UNDP and partner organizations effectively apply information from monitoring and evaluation in their daily work for accountability, improvements in performance, decision making and learning. It addresses examples of the use of evaluative evidence, available tools and means for effective knowledge and information sharing, and practical guidance to support publication and dissemination of evaluation information.

8.1   WHY USE MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

Each monitoring and evaluation activity has a purpose. UNDP places great importance on monitoring and evaluation because, when done and used correctly, they strengthen the basis for **managing for results**, foster **learning** and **knowledge generation** in the organization as well as the broader development and evaluation community, and support the public **accountability** of UNDP.

Knowledge gained from monitoring and evaluation is at the core of the UNDP organizational learning process. Monitoring and evaluation provide information and facts that, when accepted and internalized, become knowledge that promotes learning. UNDP uses and applies learning from monitoring and evaluation to improve the overall performance and quality of results of ongoing and future projects, programmes and strategies. The key role of knowledge generated from monitoring and evaluation is making RBM and MfDF work. For UNDP to be effective, learning must therefore be incorporated into the core function of a programme unit through an effective learning and information sharing system.

In addition, findings and lessons from monitoring and evaluation can be used for partnership building and advocacy. For example, if evaluations highlight achievements and good practices, they can be used to solicit support for UNDP work and share the vision and strategy for UNDP support for greater partnership. A systematic use of monitoring and evaluation not only enhances UNDP credibility as a public organization, but also promotes a culture of results-orientation and transparency within the organization and amongst its partners. Knowledge generated from monitoring and evaluation becomes a public good. As a leading knowledge-based organization, UNDP has a role in effectively sharing and dissemination such knowledge to contribute to the global efforts in MfDR.

8.2 LEARNING AND GENERATING KNOWLEDGE FROM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LEARNING

The increasing focus of UNDP on MfDR and outcomes has shifted its emphasis from inputs, outputs and processes to development results at the outcome level. When the focus is on outcomes, which are influenced by multiple factors and are beyond the direct control of UNDP, the traditional view of assigning accountability to individuals for delivering outputs is no longer adequate. Accountability for outcomes encompasses RBM. Learning constructively from past mistakes and experiences is a critical part of MfDR and the UNDP accountability framework.

Monitoring and evaluation can only play a significant role in the accountability process if measures to enhance learning are put in place. Through regular exchange of information, reporting, knowledge products, learning sessions and the evaluation management response system, information from monitoring and evaluation can be fed back into the learning process and planning. UNDP needs to focus on learning from monitoring and evaluation to make a meaningful contribution to outcome achievement accountability and to encourage innovation for better results.

USING KNOWLEDGE IN PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

One of the most direct ways of using knowledge gained from monitoring and evaluation is to inform ongoing and future planning and programming. Lessons from evaluations of programmes, projects and initiatives and management responses should be available when new outcomes are being formulated or projects or programmes are identified, designed and appraised. At the time of revising or developing new programmes, projects, policies, strategies and other initiatives, UNDP should call for a consultative meeting with key partners and stakeholders to review and share evaluative knowledge in a systematic and substantive manner.

Institutionalization of the learning process can be achieved in part by better incorporating learning into existing tools and processes. Knowledge from monitoring and evaluation should be incorporated in the following:

- **Project revisions**—Monitoring and evaluation should together answer a number of useful questions such as whether the project initiatives are relevant to development needs, the project implementation is on track (outputs are being delivered on time), the strategy and logic of the results chain are working, the partnership strategy is efficient, and the project is reaching its target beneficiaries as intended. In addition to answering these questions, evaluation provides information as to 'why' things are working or not working. Such information should be incorporated in the improvements of the project strategy and trigger adjustments in a timely manner. When budget or other revisions are made to the project document, the lessons associated with the purpose of such change should also be stated. Good documentation of lessons and their internalization in project revisions help UNDP and its partners manage for results and foster a culture of systematic learning.

- **Replication and upscaling**—Evaluation of pilot initiatives is a must before such initiatives are replicated or scaled up. Lessons on what has and has not worked should inform the replication process. Again, good documentation of lessons and their internalization in the replication and upscaling processes will help UNDP and its partners ensure that mistakes are not repeated.

Monitoring and evaluation lessons should be incorporated into the formulation of:

- **New programme documents**—Country, regional and global programmes are formulated taking into account results achieved and lessons learned from regular reporting tools, internal reviews, and relevant evaluations, including project and outcome evaluations and independent evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office, such as the ADR, which looks at the UNDP contribution towards development results in a given country. The evaluations of the regional and global cooperation frameworks should also provide substantive inputs to the design of respective programmes. It is also helpful to consult reviews and evaluations conducted by UNDP partners and non-partners in a similar thematic or subject area to find out whether any lessons can be drawn from their experiences. It is good practice to document the sources of such evaluative information in a programme document as a future reference and for transparency purposes. Members of the Programme Appraisal Committee should ensure that there is clear evidence that relevant independent and decentralized evaluations are used in the formulation of new programme documents.

- **Project documents or AWPs**—Project documents should include reference to the findings of relevant reviews or evaluations in the situation analysis section. Members of the Project Appraisal Committee should ensure compliance with this requirement by requesting explicitly which evaluation findings and lessons have informed the project design.

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE IN DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION

As a partner in development, UNDP should ensure that its evaluations contribute to a better understanding of development effectiveness in the development community

The Nepal country office has been making a concerted effort to learn from and use evaluations. Most recently, in preparation for the development of the new CPD (2008-2010), the office reviewed all outcome evaluations under the current programme, project evaluations from 2006 (approximately eight were conducted), and other reviews and assessments conducted between 2003 and the end of 2006. The office synthesized the main findings and recommendations—focusing on the recurring points, common lessons and most relevant issues for the development of the new programme—into a 40-page document that was used as a reference while preparing the CPD. The office has also referred to it and shared relevant sections summarizing lessons learned when discussing joint programming or collaboration possibilities with other UN organizations.

The country office uses evaluations, particularly project evaluations, when preparing successor projects or extensions. They have developed a checklist for approval of new projects and substantive revisions, which includes a section for the monitoring and evaluation team. In addition to checking the monitoring and evaluation sections of the narrative, the results frameworks, and other monitoring tools, if there has been a recent evaluation, the monitoring and evaluation unit in the office reviews the evaluation and the project document together to ensure that relevant recommendations have been incorporated in the new project or revision.

Source: UNDP Nepal—extract from contribution to the EvalNet discussion, June 2007.

beyond UNDP. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations from evaluations should be widely shared and made available to potential users, as dissemination to audiences beyond UNDP and its immediate stakeholders can increase the impact of evaluations in important ways. For this purpose, evaluation reports should be made available to a wider audience. However, users often find evaluation reports too long and not easily accessible. Therefore, lessons and knowledge from the evaluations can be 'packaged' in the form of a **knowledge product** to meet the needs of a wider audience.

In order to effectively target a broader audience, there should be a thorough analysis of who the potential users of evaluation knowledge and lessons are, what they do, what their information needs are, how their learning takes place, and what kinds of communication and knowledge products are most suitable to achieve the objective of sharing knowledge. The commissioning programme unit should designate an individual (for example, a communications officer or knowledge management officer) to lead the process and coordinate activities to ensure effective sharing and dissemination of evaluation reports, lessons, knowledge and knowledge products.[60]

There are numerous ways to share information from evaluations. Below are some examples:

■ Upload evaluation reports and other knowledge products based on evaluations on the **organization's public websites**. Ensure that the reports and the knowledge products are written clearly and made available in the most commonly used local languages.

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60 UNDP Communications Tool Kit (http://comtoolkit.undp.org/) provides guidance on how to do effective communication and outreach.

- Organize a **meeting with interested stakeholders** to discuss lessons from the evaluation(s).

- Incorporate evaluation findings and lessons learned in the organization's existing **publications, such as annual reports, newsletters or bulletins**.

- Present findings and lessons at the **annual stakeholders meeting,** such as CPAP review meetings and forums with media.

- Develop a **brochure for UNDP activities and accomplishments**.

- Develop a **brief with a concise summary** in a plain language and widely circulate. UNDP may include the development of a brief in the ToR of the evaluators. Alternatively, the evaluation manager or a UNDP communications officer may develop it in consultation with the evaluators.

- Publish an **article for an academic journal** based on the evaluation findings.

- Present a **paper at a conference** related to the evaluation subject area.

- **Invite local researchers and academics** to discuss the data collected for the evaluation or to discuss the evaluation methodology and methods applied in the evaluation. This effort can also be supported by the evaluators.

- Share findings, recommendations and lessons learned at **training sessions and workshops** for UNDP staff, government counterparts and other partners. Training should focus on areas such as how to improve the quality of UNDP programmes and projects and develop skills in methodological innovations.

- Share lessons through **knowledge networks within and beyond UNDP**. For BDP, feed lessons into practice notes and other knowledge products developed by the policy and practice bureaux and units in Headquarters.

It is critical to make information from evaluations user friendly, easily accessible and advantageous to the audience. The following section provides guidance on how to develop a useful knowledge product.

8.3 KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS AND DISSEMINATION

Knowledge products can take many different forms depending on the audience and their information needs. For meaningful learning and knowledge sharing, knowledge products should be of high quality with a clearly identified audience and purpose. The characteristics of a good knowledge product, including a good publication, are listed in Box 43.

Keeping these characteristics in mind before the starting analysis or preparing a knowledge product will help organize the evidence in an orderly fashion.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS AND DISSEMINATION

The **dissemination** is as important as the development of knowledge products. Only an efficient system of dissemination will ensure that the target recipients receive the monitoring and evaluation feedback that is relevant to their specific needs. Some of the

most commonly applied dissemination methods for monitoring and evaluation products include: printed reports, HTML or PDF copies of the products shared on the internal and external Internet sites and through e-mail messages and list-serves, and CD-ROMs. The media can be a powerful partner in disseminating findings, recommendations and lessons from evaluation. In many countries, the media has played a critical role in advocating for accountability and addressing sensitive issues.

The following are practical steps for developing knowledge products from monitoring and evaluation and disseminating them.

Step 1: Identify target audiences and their information needs

Some of the commonly identified key target audiences for evaluation reports and knowledge products are the following:

- UNDP colleagues in country offices and other units

- Government counterparts who may or may not be directly involved in the project under evaluation but can facilitate the policy changes recommended by the evaluation or otherwise aid in the country-level advocacy of UNDP

- Development partners, other UN organizations, NGOs, and academic and research institutions

- Other networks of evaluators (for example, a national evaluation association)

Those responsible for knowledge sharing and dissemination should assess the information needs of the various groups, including when the information is most needed and is likely to serve as an 'agent of change.' For example, government counterparts may find certain information from an evaluation particularly useful in making critical policy decisions. When planning for a monitoring and evaluation exercise, the commissioning unit should be aware when the 'window of opportunity' for decision making arises and

make the information available in a manner that is appropriate for the technical and functional needs of the target audience.

Step 2: Collect stakeholder contact information

The success of every dissemination effort is highly dependent on the recipient contact information gathered during the monitoring and evaluation processes. For example, the evaluation team members meet with key stakeholders and national counterparts who, regardless of their degree of involvement in the evaluation topic, constitute a critical audience and should be informed about the knowledge generated from evaluation. The contact information of these individuals should be gathered by the evaluation team and shared with those responsible for disseminating and sharing the knowledge.

Step 3: Determine types of products that meet the audience's information needs

In addition to publishing information from regular monitoring reports[61] and evaluation reports, a mix of knowledge products can be developed to meet the information demand of different groups. A systematic assessment of the needs and demand for specific products among targeted audiences can be undertaken to ensure the relevance and value of the products. The following are some examples of communication means and products for evaluation:

■ Evaluation executive summary—Evaluation reports should include a succinct, yet comprehensive and information-rich executive summary. This summary can be used as a stand-alone product to enhance the readership of the evaluation.

■ Evaluation brief—This should be a three- to five-page non-technical summation of the executive summary to increase general interest without overwhelming the reader. The Evaluation Office's publication manual provides information on how to write evaluation briefs using non-technical language.

■ Evaluation blurb—This is a one-paragraph description designed to increase the visibility of published content and announce the report publication on the webpage and via electronic announcements and list serves.

It is the responsibility of UNDP to ensure relevant and high quality knowledge products are produced in a timely manner. In order to safeguard the integrity and accuracy of the evaluation information, the commissioning units may consider including the task of producing these knowledge products in the ToRs of the evaluation team.

Step 4: Identify language requirements per product and audience

In order to optimize the impact of knowledge sharing and dissemination efforts, knowledge products should be translated into local languages whenever possible. If resources are limited, the commissioning unit may determine language requirements per knowledge product or per audience group. At a minimum, the evaluation brief

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61 Circumstances may not allow UNDP and its partners to publish monitoring reports 'as is' due to their internal nature. In order to share information widely, UNDP may need to extract critical knowledge from such information and package it in a manner that can be disseminated. Regarding evaluation, UNDP evaluation policy requires all evaluation reports to be publicly made available.

should be translated into the most widely used local language. Additionally, the language used in the product should be appropriate for the technical levels of the targeted audience. It is best to avoid technical jargon and heavy acronym usage.

Step 5: Determine efficient forms and dissemination methods per evaluation knowledge product

Most evaluation reports and knowledge products can be shared as an electronic copy. In order to enhance the efficiency in terms of time and cost, the organization's public webpage and the e-mail list should be strategically used as means for dissemination (see Box 44). For example, the evaluation reports should be uploaded on the organization's internal and external webpage with a blurb that summarizes the key information in the report.

Box 44. Tools and networks to support evaluation knowledge sharing

Evaluation Resource Centre: The ERC, available at erc.undp.org, is a repository of evaluation reports and serves as the organization's primary tool for knowledge management in evaluation. To date, it contains more than 1,000 evaluation reports and 400 evaluation ToRs. Reports can be searched by region, country, evaluation type, year and other key words. It also provides a list of evaluation focal points across UNDP to foster information exchange and learning on evaluation.

Knowledge products by policy and practice bureaux in Headquarters (BDP, BCPR and Partnership Bureau): Policy and practice bureaux in UNDP Headquarters produce a number of knowledge-based products in UNDP core results areas and their respective focus areas. Lessons from evaluations provide useful inputs to their ongoing work on knowledge consolidation and sharing.

Knowledge networks and communities of practice: In UNDP, there are networks and communities of practice that are linked to the UNDP worldwide system of subregional resource facilities and regional centres. Evaluation managers or UNDP communications officers can share evaluation reports or other related knowledge products with colleagues throughout the organization by submitting it to a practice-area knowledge network, such as the Governance Network (dgp-net) or the Poverty Network (pr-net).

The Evaluation Network or 'EvalNet': This functions more directly than the corporate knowledge management system to support the design and development of information and knowledge products from monitoring and evaluation activities. This network remains largely driven by stakeholder participation. EvalNet is a group of UNDP staff, mainly from country offices, that participate in UNDP evaluations, develop RBM tools and methodologies, and organize evaluation capacity development activities. The objectives of the network are to enhance UNDP as a learning organization and to promote results-oriented monitoring and evaluation as part of the UNDP organizational culture.

Additionally, knowledge from monitoring and evaluation can be shared widely by incorporating them in existing reports and publications, such as the country office's annual report or other key reports, brochures and news bulletins.

Step 6: Monitor feedback and measure results of dissemination efforts

There should be a feedback and learning mechanism for the effectiveness of the dissemination strategy and quality of the particular knowledge product. For example,

UNDP may conduct a quick survey among the recipients of the knowledge products or develop a feature on its website where users can provide their feedback directly online.

In analysing the feedback, the following should be asked: "To what extent has the monitoring and evaluation information been used in programming and policy making within and beyond UNDP?"; "Has such information been made in a timely manner to effectively influence decision-making processes?"; "Have the products reached both direct and indirect audiences in an efficient manner and were they easily accessible?"; "Did the audience find the knowledge products useful?"; "If not, why not?"; and "What could be done better next time?"

Lessons from the experience should be reflected in the future evaluation knowledge sharing and dissemination efforts so that evaluations in UNDP will continue to be relevant and contribute to organizational learning and the enhancement of a global knowledge base in development.