How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

Toolkit Nº6

Using knowledge to improve policy influence

This toolkit is part of a series addressing the various steps to be followed in the process of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of public policies.

Once the data collection have been implemented (see **Toolkit 5: Methods for data collection**) the organization will count on –and should take advantage of– valuable knowledge about its influence capacity. In fact, the collected information will not only reveal progress (or lack of progress) towards policy influence objectives but it can also trigger the generation of lessons about what has worked and what has not.

To promote strategic reflection and learning, it is very important to define two main issues: 1) how the collected data will be stored, organized and analyzed (and who will do this), and 2) what specific processes to ensure generation and documentation of the knowledge gathered will be carried out. These two issues are closely linked with **knowledge management**. In fact, an effective and fruitful M&E system of policy influence is an opportunity to foster other positive changes in the organization: other individuals and teams may be enriched by the learning generated around policy influence.

In order for organizations to make timely changes within their influence processes and also maximize their experience once finalized, it is very important that they choose concrete ways of working with the generated knowledge.

What is knowledge management for policy influence?

These are processes of horizontal exchange of knowledge about policy influence; they take place collectively within an organization.
Knowledge stems from individuals within the organization; it is specified and socialized through information technologies or other traditional formats.
Finally, other members of the organization appropriate the generated knowledge to improve their own influence capability and generate or change institutional practices. (Weyrauch et al, 2010)

First step: define how the collected information will be analyzed and reflected upon

To enable that the data collected become a concrete tool for decision-making about current or future policy work is a challenge. Therefore, it is key that those who lead the M&E system of influence include specific instances of reflection and debate about the information that has been generated.

If various tools for data collection have been simultaneously applied (for example, episode studies, interviews and focus groups) it is convenient to think of some way to collate all that information in the same place in order to link, compare and analyze it in an effective way. One example of this practice is the "Reflexivity" tool, which is being developed for Save the Children United Kingdom to monitor and evaluate policy influence of its main campaign, "EVERY ONE[1]," which focuses on reducing maternal and child mortality. This tool gathers, in one document, information on a set of several indicators which each national office of the organization can establish to monitor and evaluate its policy influence processes. Information is obtained through various methods of data collection, but it is compiled in this one repository which allows for the establishment of connections among the registered results and the different products, activities and policy influence strategies.

The manner in which information is organized will serve as a base to establish how to analyze or utilize it (for example, when linking the diverse influence strategies which possess common indicators). This organized information should be used as the main input for debate and reflection intervals. For example, an option is to produce advance or progress reports. These are documents synthesizing the information gathered during the monitoring process. This information is analyzed according to the indicators previously defined with the goal of corroborating whether the designed strategy and actions implemented contribute to the proposed influence objective.

Progress reports constitute a highly useful tool, since they enable the revision of our own design of the policy influence process. That is to say, if from the progress report we understand that reality does not correspond with the expected results, we can revise the influence plan. In addition, it is possible that the information gathered is insufficient to make decisions about the progress of the initiative so we may decide to incorporate new indicators. We may also decide to adjust the M&E system to a new context or unanticipated active actors.

In general, progress reports describe:

- The **context** in which the activity is developed and the changes involved. To be aware of the context allows for adapting the influence strategies proposed in the map of change[2] and to modify some activities while making progress as well. A systematic and regular monitoring of the conditions that surround us allows, for example, for anticipation of some operative difficulties. Let's suppose the coordinator of a project receives quarterly follow-up reports on a project of law which the organization is promoting. He/she may decide to contact new legislators who are becoming interested in the issue to improve their influence. These reports should include a brief description of the critical events of the period –security issues, government actions, demonstrations, dialogues, etc.– and their implications: e.g., whether to suspend activities in an unsafe area. The information is mainly gathered from key informants, and media.
- The **actors** involved and how their interests, attitudes and behavior vary throughout the initiative. Once we are clear as to the context in which we move, we should make a note of the largest number possible of actors involved in the intervention. When analyzing the impact of the actions carried out under the project, it is worth

1 More information about the campaign at www.everyone.org.

2 For a description of the map of change, see Weyrauch, V. (2012), **Toolkit N°3: Establishing the bases for M&E strategy**. In How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence? Buenos Aires: CIPPEC. Available in July at: www.vippal.org.

identifying which actors cooperated with or hindered the objective proposed. The Outcome mapping, explained in **Module 5** is also a useful tool to identify key actors and context changes. A dynamic stakeholder analysis will allow for detection, in the final evaluation, of those changes which might have taken place in relation to participating actors. For example, whether new actors joined in, whether others abandoned the initiative, if a new alliance or a network was constituted or strengthened, or if the actors´ roles varied during the implementation of the initiative.

Generally speaking, all evaluations will include a final report containing **findings, conclusions and recommendations.**

- **Findings** are related to changes linked to our own influence actions, such as changes in specific knowledge, behaviors or practices of certain actors we wish to influence.
- **Conclusions** are deductions and lessons learned, extracted from the experience of M&E.
- **Recommendations** are contributions which we can produce for future similar actions, based on the documented experience.

It is best if the report is concise and relatively brief so that decision-makers in the organization (and eventually outside it) can clearly and quickly identify, the key lessons of the influence process. It is also useful to share this report with all the external actors who were involved in the M&E process so that they may provide opinions and new perspectives how evaluation results may be interepreted. In addition, they may be in an ideal position to be neutral regarding the efficacy of our work.

Second step: promote moments for debate, reflection and decision-making

Moments of continual reflection are crucial to ensure that the collected information is analyzed in an effective manner, and is utilized to learn and improve the policy influence work. These moments may consist of regular ad hoc meetings or be a part of existing processes of debate in the organization (for example weekly team lunches) or of existing evaluation periods (for example, the anual evaluation).

Moments of reflection may include members of the organization who have not been linked directly with the M&E system, as well as other external actors who may contribute to the analysis and discussion process (for example, partner organizations of a collective public campaign, or policy experts).

Their suggestions, questions and reflections may significantly contribute to the organizational learning since they will probably question institutional assumptions or enlighten the process with new ideas or possibilities.

Principles and values which facilitate knowledge management

Some organizational conditions and requirements are key for the success of any knowledge exchange:

- Respect for ideological diversity
- Trust
- Freedom to work
- Horizontal decision-making
- Openness to criticism
- Passion for learning
- Personal commitment
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Teamwork

Reflections should not focus solely on what happened and what did not, but also on why, through the identification of internal and external factors which may have significantly affected the results of the strategies or activities.

This instance is also a good opportunity to re-examine our own beliefs and assumptions about crucial issues such as power, gender and social change which frequently influence the establishment of strategies and the possibilities of success. It is important to analyze global, national and local contexts, and the circumstances that surround them as well, since these variables influence the definition of more effective strategies and approaches[3].

It is also ideal to promote creative thinking. The challenge is to remain open to the unexpected results which may emerge beyond what has been established within the evaluation frameworkand had not been contemplated in the initial design, but which are important for an understanding of the total impact of influence efforts.

According to findings and conclusions, the team must collectively decide whether it is necessary to carry out changes in planning, strategies and influence activities. It is recommended that these changes be documented in order to understand the whole process, why these changed were necessary and how they affected the final outcomes.

Third step: select tools or formats to socialize the knowledge generated

If there are resources available, the organization or team should consider innovative and attractiveways of sharing lessons learned with other members of the team, and potentially with external partners, beneficiaries or donors as well. For this, there is a variety of tools which enable systematizing, organizing and disseminating generated knowledge in a creative and effective manner, some of which are listed in **figure 1**. A description including how to use each of them is available in the handbook *Learners, practitioners and teachers* (CIPPEC, 2010).

Figure 1. Tools for knowledge management

Communities of practice Mental maps Six-hat-thinking Knowledge-based activities	Storytelling Peer assistance Internal newsletter Intranet Challenging sessions	Internal handbook Exit interviews Shared folders Knowledge harvesting Staff directory
Scenario testing Learning actions Communities of practice	Forums and meetings Workshops and training Knowledge fairs Storytelling Virtual media	Directory of policy influence experts

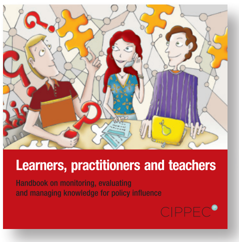
Before selecting these tools, each organization should be aware of its current internal knowledge management system (if there are existing internal processes which may be taken advantage of to systematize and broadcast lessons learned, and how far it aspires to go with this effort of systematization). Undoubtedly, a good use of the knowledge generated through the M&E influence system will provide members of the organization with feedback on existing processes, concrete ideas on how to improve operational and strategic decision-making and optimize policy influence work.

3 Action Research on Planning, Assessing and Learning in People-Centred Advocacy, 2005. More information at: http://www.landcoalition.org/es/global-initiatives/womens-land-rights/action-aid-action-research-and-people-centred-advocacy.

I need help!

Recommendations for reading or consultations by CIPPEC´s Civil Society Directorate for the M&E of policy influence.

- *Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence*, CIPPEC, 2010, pages 85-107. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org.



- "Action Research on Planning, Assessing and Learning in People-Centred Advocacy. Summary of Learning", *Advocacy Action Research Project,* Action Aid, Working Paper 1, 2005. Available at: www.landcoalition.org.

- *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: Lessons from international development agencies,* Ben Ramalingam, ODI, 2005. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

- *Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning: An International Development Perspective. An Annotated Bibliography,* Ingie Hovland, ODI, 2003. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

- *Learning to fly,* Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell, Oxford, Capstone, 2001.

- *Tools for Knowledge and Learning. A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations, Ben Ramalingam,* ODI, 2006. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

- "Six Thinking Hats", Edward De Bono, in *Tools for Knowledge and Learning. A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations,* Ben Ramalingam, ODI, 2006, pages 50-52. Available at: www.odi.org.uk.

In Spanish:

- *Knowledge management for policy influence emerges in Latin America.* Work document N°42, CIPPEC, 2010. Available at: www.vippal.cippec.org.

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