

*IKM Summaries No. 13*

## **Monitoring and evaluating development as a knowledge ecology: ideas for new collective practices**

The objective of this paper is to look beyond the knowledge industry to recognise the place of other knowledge cultures in a collective inquiry about the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of knowledge for development (K4D). The central contention of this paper is to look not only at the industry of knowledge (overwhelmingly brought forward by development aid) but also at the environment in which all knowledge cultures co-exist and jointly shape the results of development initiatives of any kind. Arguably, this journey around what we would like to call the *knowledge ecology* will give a clearer picture of promising efforts to assess the role of knowledge for development.

The paper offers an alternative journey which conceptualises M&E as a collective inquiry whose learning focus is knowledge management for development. It does so by respecting the diversity of aspirations and susceptible behaviours of the various adventurers volunteering for the enterprise of knowledge management (KM) and the M&E of KM. It considers the (conceptual) equipment necessary to be fit for the journey, to avoid getting lost in the journey that pursues, monitors and evaluates the maze-like forest of development initiatives.

IKM Emergent takes the position that knowledge for development (K4D) is an intentional change process involving multiple knowledges drawn from multiple interests. K4D is thus a collective learning process which ideally expands the knowledges of all participants and puts that learning into collaborative action. A framework that provides a context for allowing the main interest in any comprehensive change process to hear and learn from each other has been developed, based on Kolb's 1984 work on the experiential learning cycle, and further developed as a collective learning spiral by Brown (2008).

A collective learning spiral follows four stages, clarifying ideals, determining the facts, brainstorming their collective ideas and then putting them into practice. The key interested parties learn from each other at each stage, producing further knowledge which has been collectively constructed. The framework not only brings together the interests needed to effect change as knowledge cultures (individuals, communities, specialists, organisations and holistic thinkers) and functional groups.

Using an open collective learning spiral as the basis for M&E has the advantages of being:



- Open: this framework is sufficiently open to address and embrace the pre-existing frameworks of knowledge initiatives, whether linear and tangible (as the Logical Framework), inter-related and intangible (as Outcome Mapping) or even systemic (such as the Knowledge Into Action framework).
- Inclusive: The spiral begins with a diagnosis of all the players involved in the action for change. The current division is predetermined from a Western perspective, but can be broadened or re-conceptualised for other constructions of knowledge.
- Collaborative: The evaluators are fellow learners in the enterprise, and so privy to project participants' ideals and ideas and the relationships that guide the activities. They can act as critical friends rather than as external judges.
- Creative: As part of the learning cycle, the skills of the evaluator enhance the project itself, by recognizing unintended as well as intended consequences.
- Discursive and reflexive: this framework strongly emphasises the importance of dialogue and reflection among a group of participants – indeed through an inquiry. This ensures that the multiple knowledges involved voice themselves and build upon each other's views.
- Future-oriented: As part of a spiral, the M&E is committed to the on-going learning in theory and in practice.

The proposed framework may sound unrealistic to some development actors, yet it relies upon the practical experiences of many attempts to monitor and evaluate knowledge initiatives. The authors hope that the M&E of K4D approach that they suggest will promote more meaningful monitoring of knowledge initiatives, better and more relevant knowledge practices and ultimately better overall results for development initiatives, whether they be of a personal, community-driven, organisational or societal nature.

The approach is not prescriptive. It recognises that there are choices at all stages of a knowledge initiative and at all stages of monitoring / evaluating it. Taking as broad a perspective on these choices and reflecting collectively upon them seems a much sounder approach to M&E of K4D, as even the failings of the initiative become more useful. M&E of K4D is a journey and the richness lies in that journey, not in reaching the ideal destination.

#### *About this IKM Summary*

This *IKM Summary* provides an overview of the following IKM Working Paper:

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