Experiences in enhancing an existing monitoring system: The case of Samriddhi in Bangladesh

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What is the case about?

- Review more than three years of “experimenting” with the Standard by the Samriddhi project in Bangladesh

- Present *good practices* and *challenges* in designing and implementing the Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) system

- Describes and documents the *evolution* of the MRM system using the Standard

- **It is analytical and asks:**
  - What factors have contributed to & inhibited the process of developing & managing the system?

- **It is also normative as it asks:**
  - What “should” be done for overcoming critical challenges in order to gradually comply, as practical as reasonable, with the Standard?
Samriddhi ("prosperity" in Bangla) at a glance
(August 2010 – June 2014)

To contribute to sustainable well-being and resilience of poor and extreme poor households through economic empowerment

The Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) identifies systemic constraints of markets and addresses them through aligning market functions and actors according to their incentives and capacities.

Core interventions
- Value chain development
- Private rural service market provision
- Rural enterprise development & expansion
- Advocacy in market systems development
Working areas

- Northern Bangladesh
- High prevalence of poverty
- High vulnerability
- Expanding coverage of areas due to replication / scaling up of good practices
Impact logic

Samriddhi facilitates Local Service Provision System for pro-poor market system change

Affordable, accessible & quality private & public services are available for the poor and extreme poor through capable local service providers

The poor and extreme poor are aware & capacitated to access & use the services made available by local service providers

The poor and extreme poor improve their enterprise performance by increasing production & productivity

The poor & extreme poor generate additional employment & income to overcome their poverty sustainably
The MRM system of Samriddhi was initially based on the systems of the two predecessor initiatives (LEAF and SAAKTI) which were mainly based on *livelihoods approach*.

The system had two parallel components:

- Monitoring of outputs, outcomes and goal as per the logical framework of the project, defined *before* any value chain assessment had been carried out.
- Monitoring of the results chains at market trigger, market uptake, enterprise performance, sector growth and poverty reduction levels.

The results chains were developed *after* the value chain assessments.
Background (2)

- Samriddhi made the decision to focus more on *market systems development* required adjusting or revising its monitoring system.

- Several process and system-related changes *could not fully be captured* and reflected by the system.

- Samriddhi decided and subsequently proposed to the donor (SDC) and HELVETAS Bangladesh to revise the logical framework to simplify and give structure to the monitoring system.
The monitoring system during the start of Samriddhi

- Reporting /sharing
  - Specific reports
    - Self-evaluation by producers / communities
  - Household surveys
  - Results chains monitoring
    - Specific studies

- Steering
  - Project monitoring database

Baseline
Rationale for adopting the DCED Standard

- First introduction to the DCED Standard ➔ one week international training followed by a three-day workshop in Bangladesh at the beginning of Samriddhi in 2010

- Was useful ➔ understanding more about the relevance of the results chains

- The project was in need of **vital information** about its performance to achieve more clarity on its priorities regarding:
  - what works and what does not?
  - how were impacts achieved?
  - why results did not unfold the way project facilitators had expected?
Rationale (2)

- Senior management & field level staff were involved in *regular exercises* ("learning by doing")

- Interest from the project ➔ Not simply for measuring results, but also using it for *day-to-day planning and project management*

- Initially priority ➔ on the *first three elements* of the Standard

- However, the project staff were not sure about the following:
  1) the added value in adopting a rigorous system based on the Standard
  2) how to practically and reasonably adopt the Standard
  3) the implications in terms of time and resources
Experiences of using the Standard

- “Pre-audit review” of the system (in March 2013) → revealed Samriddhi has clearly made **considerable progress**

- Improved its MRM system by **gradually complying** with the Standard

  - provided more thrust to the process of adjusting the MRM system to comply with the Standard
  - set the strategic direction on firm ground for improving the system

- structured and specific inputs regarding **what to prioritise**
- how to **coordinate the efforts** towards improving the system

  - **better compliance** with the Standard
  - **better management** of the project’s work in the future/next phase
Insights gained

1) Flexibility from both the donor and the project to try out new ideas
   ➔ The importance of organisational buy-in / support from the start

2) Setting up a well-functioning MRM working group
   ➔ Crucial in decision making at all levels with one one common objective

3) Development of an integrated MRM manual
   ➔ promoting a common understanding and reliable practice
   ➔ Good source of information for strategic decision making (e.g. phasing out three value chains in 2013)

4) Making MRM part of everyone’s job
   ➔ MRM responsibilities in job descriptions and annual staff performance review + coaching/capacity building
   ➔ high importance to the capacity building of its staff through external consultants
Example of phasing out value chains based on improved MRM system.
Challenges in complying with the DECD Standard

1) Full compliance vs. “prioritising” elements of the Standard

- The *first four* elements of the Standard were found to be by far the most helpful: both for *day-to-day planning and project management & measuring results*

- This does not suggest *self-selection* but “*right-sizing*” the scale of the effort by prioritising elements critical in making the right decisions

- Prioritising elements of the standard (while downsizing others) ➔ to keep costs of the MRM system at a reasonable level
Challenges (2)

2) Estimating attributable changes

- The project has developed its attribution strategy ➔ crucial in demonstrating the *causal link between results & interventions*

- Estimating attributable changes ➔ *one of the most difficult challenges*

- *Multiplicity of actors* and *complex partnerships* make measuring attribution difficult and unreliable, if not impossible

- Highly seasonal agricultural production systems compounded by frequent threats from disaster affect production and prices

- What can be measured, what can be directly and indirectly attributed to the facilitation of the project became complex for the project staff
Challenges (3)

3) Project experience vs. organisational ownership of the MRM system

- Samriddhi staff employed by HELVETAS Bangladesh as implementing organisation work 100% for the project.

- Projects are temporary, and when Samriddhi is phased-out, all the knowledge and experience will likely not stay with the organisation.

- Organisational ownership of the system → requires strong and consistent MRM “champions” to introduce the system to and sustain it.
Key lessons

- Efficient and effective compliance requires capacity building that should:
  1) Start as early as possible
  2) Not as a one-off event, but as a continuous process

- Compliance requires adequate allocation of resources – both human and financial. The lack of resources may lead to “self-selection” and “partially compliance” irrespective of necessity

- Compliance is first and foremost for effective project management and strategic decision making.

- Organisational buy-in from the start is highly crucial for smooth implementation
Thank you