

WACSERIES Op-Ed  
No. 4 - May 2019

# 4 Common Reasons why CSOs Struggle with M&E

*By Jimm Chick Fomunjong & Franck Sombo*



## AUTHORS



Jimm Chick Fomunjong is a Cameroonian. He has over ten years of experience working with civil society across West and Central Africa. He led the communications department of the West Africa Civil Society Institute between 2012 and 2016. He developed the Institute's communication strategy and led in its implementation during this period. He is currently serving as the Head of Knowledge Management of the WACSI. He has an in depth understanding of the civil society sector in Ghana and West Africa and brings on board a diverse range of experiences from working with CSOS across the continent.



Franck Sombo is a development practitioner with the drive to lead self and others to influence productivity and efficiency. His work involves supporting organisations to develop strategic plans, design monitoring and evaluation systems, develop and use relevant performance measurement tools to track progress, assess organizational growth and institutionalise learning. Franck has eight years of experience working with WACSI where he currently serves as the Head, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

---

### Edited by

Gervin Chanase- Programme Officer, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Unit, WACSI

### About WACSI

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was created by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) to reinforce the institutional and operational capacities of civil society in the region. WACSI also serves as a resource centre for training, research and documentation, experience sharing and political dialogue for CSOs in West Africa.

### About WACSERIES

WACSeries are analytical periodic write-ups on topical themes and issues relevant to West Africa. These write-ups provide experts, researchers and practitioners a space to reflect, analyse and posit views and recommendations on emerging issues and debates.

The WACSeries Op-Eds are thought provoking and intellectually engaging write-ups that provide critical reflections and analysis of issues relevant to civil society and development in West Africa.

### Objectives of WACSERIES

- To raise awareness on key issues in West Africa;
- To generate debates and discussions on these issues;
- To proffer recommendations on civil society involvement in advocacy;
- To provide recommendations to policy makers.

# 4 Common Reasons why CSOs Struggle with M&E

Copyright WACSI 2019

**All rights reserved. No part of this report may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the Institute except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. The Institute requests the use of information in this report be registered with them for impact assessment purposes.**

## **Disclaimer:**

WACSI accepts no responsibility for suitability of any materials submitted by the contributors of this publication. WACSI assumes no responsibility or liability for errors or inaccuracies. Contributors accept all responsibility for opinions expressed. Use of this research report constitutes acceptance and understanding of these disclaimers.

## **For more information, write to:**

**West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) No. 9 Bamboo Street (Formerly Bingu Street), East Legon P.O. Box AT 1956, Achimota Accra, Ghana  
Email: [research@wacsi.org](mailto:research@wacsi.org) Tel: +233 (0) 302 550 224**

## **Cite as:**

**Fomunjong, J . C. , Sombo, F. (2019). 4 Common Reasons why CSOs Struggle with M&E. West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana.**

To contribute to this publication,  
contact : [research@wacsi.org](mailto:research@wacsi.org)  
+233(0)501440545



### Introduction

*Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are two separate but complementary functions, that together form part of an emerging development practice within the civil society sector. M&E is defined as “a process that helps improve performance and achieve results. It is mainly used to assess the performance of projects, institutions and programmes set up by governments, international organisations and NGOs. It establishes links between the past, present and future actions.” In other words, it is a process or approach that is meant to help an organisation grow and achieve greater results. It must therefore mobilise more attention and dedication for its adoption and implementation in every organisation.*

However, it is common to come across situations where organisations haven't fully realised the importance of monitoring and evaluation and the value it may bring them. Often, M&E are not an integral part of organisations' planning and management efforts. In many organisations, they have been kept on the 'substitutes' bench'. Long treated as an after-thought, monitoring and evaluation have been relegated to a second-tier activity, needed mainly when there are

no other options. Many view monitoring and evaluation as a donor requirement for accountability and a condition to access funding. Unfortunately, it is often reduced to a jargon used to serve donors' interest.

Some CSOs claim that they do not have adequate resources and time to conduct proper monitoring and evaluation, and usually resort to sporadic donor commissioned external evaluations to satisfy temporal needs. Amid different competing interests and budget constraints, M&E is often sidetracked and only considered when programmes or projects are close to completion and there is pressure to demonstrate results. In contrast, when properly applied, it could serve to support effective programmes and project design, planning and organisational management.

As participants from the recent results-based monitoring and evaluation training (May 2019) organised by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) in Lagos, Nigeria argued, 'when something is considered a priority you find the time and attention for it'. M&E is undoubtedly an essential function for the effectiveness of an organisation. The bene-

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUSzePBTpAY>

## 4 Common Reasons why CSOs Struggle with M&E

By Jimm Chick Fomunjong & Franck Sombo

fits of streamlining M&E are multifold. They include improved efficiency, confidence in the use of data, trust and credibility among others. According to Dr. Chuks Eresia-Eke, "monitoring describes an ongoing process of gathering information to track that we are making some kind of progress". He states that "evaluation is an assessment of where we are at any point in time" and adds that it "is an episodic - a time to time - assessment of where we are at the moment to determine whether that is where we are supposed to be". There is no definite recipe in applying monitoring and evaluation in relation to the scope, the depth and the trajectory to follow. Different organisations have varied needs; but there are existing guidelines and frameworks to offer suggestion and direction. When well harnessed and contextually applied, M&E provides the necessary self-check and safeguard to ensure an organisation is not sidetracked but remain focused and consistent in delivering its mandate. Peter Drucker, the famous strategist and management expert once said that; "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which must not be done at all." M&E help

us to avoid just that: performing so efficiently in a direction, which must not be pursued in the first place. But what keeps civil society organisations (CSOs) from effectively integrating and applying M&E? Why does it not seem attractive to many CSO leaders and managers? What are the some of the factors that account for the ineffective adoption and implementation of M&E in organisations? What could be done to address these impeding factors? Why is monitoring and evaluation important and how could it be used to support decision-making? These are some interrogations regarding the topic, but let's explore possible suggested answers.

*"When well harnessed and contextually applied, M&E provides the necessary self-check and safeguard to ensure an organisation is not sidetracked but remain focused"*



# Factors that impede effective Monitoring and Evaluation in an Organisation

**1. Poor understanding of the role of M&E for the Organisation:** Some organisations fail to recognise the crucial role M&E plays in boosting organisational performance and growth. They do not realise that insights from M&E are crucial in guiding far reaching decisions to be taken based on the evidence of what is working and what is not. Sometimes, the perception that M&E is a complex phenomenon creates a phobia towards M&E within an organisation. Such organisations may opt for the usual, i.e. hiring consultants on an ad hoc basis to provide deliverables meant to respond to an external party's demand, rather than taking ownership of the process and building stronger and resilient systems that support the growth of the organisation. The role of external resource persons is important, but mostly so when meant to help the organisation build internal capacity, pick up key lessons and improve performance to drive its agenda. In the long run, dependency hampers organisational growth.

**2. Absence of a monitoring and evaluation culture in the organisation:** Some organisations have no strategic inclination towards the continuous collation of information on their programmes and operations. Organisations with a poor M&E culture allot little or no funds to support M&E and worst of all, dedicate very little or no time for M&E activities. For them, M&E is more like an event than a way of life. Many times, organisations rely on individual perceptions than on evidence provided through deliberate intelligence and insights gathered from an intentional and systematic process. This risks to maintain organisations in programmatic and operational routine or stagnation - a stage in the organisation when they continue to do the same things over and over while expecting different results .

**3. Weak M&E capacity:** It is obvious that to uphold a holistic evaluative and learning culture, organisations need to have both the manpower and savoir faire to embed M&E within operational and programmatic systems and processes. However, adequate capacity in this domain remains a gruesome challenge for some CSOs. Participants in both Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation trainings in Cote d'Ivoire (2018) and Nigeria (2019) identified weak staff capacity in M&E as a barrier to effective M&E in organisations. Additionally, they observed that some CSOs lack the ability to report and document the change they are contributing to. This is made worst in some organisations because, they either do not have anyone overseeing the M&E role in the organisation or any staff with the minimum capacity, interest and commitment to capture, process and document the very minimum of data required to inform strategic decisions in the organisation. In such cases, organisations content themselves with ad hoc 'shopping' of data and reporting in the name of a M&E. This is done with the primary goal of responding to external accountability as opposed to improving performance and shaping the organisation's growth.

**4. Operational inefficiencies:** Humans make organisations. In every human endeavour, there are risks of friction and cohesion challenges. When this happens, it carries a negative bearing on teams' effectiveness within organisations. When this happens, it carries a negative bearing on teams' effectiveness within organisations. Participants in the training in Lagos identified the seclusion of M&E staff in project conception among the challenges within organisations that can hamper the effectiveness of M&E. They also mentioned lack of collaboration between M&E and programmes teams, inadequate communication and synergy within the organisation or between the M&E team and programmes staff.

*“Humans make organisations.  
In every human endeavour,  
there are risks of friction and  
cohesion challenges”*



## FACTORS THAT IMPEDE EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN AN ORGANISATION

*By Jimm Chick Fomunjong  
and Franck Sombo*



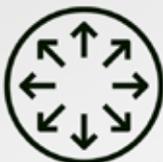
1

**Poor understanding of the role of M&E for the Organisation**



2

**Absence of a monitoring and evaluation culture in the organisation**



3

**Weak M&E capacity**



4

**Operational inefficiencies**



### Mitigation Strategies

To mitigate these challenges, the following are some key recommendations that organisations that find themselves in one or more of the above circumstances can apply.

**Recognise that M&E is essential for organisational growth:** Organisations should more regularly build awareness on the importance of M&E. This can be ensured by enabling a practice of developing periodic (monthly/quarterly) documentation and sharing of data/results gathered through M&E processes with staff and partners.

**Have dedicated personnel for M&E:** Organisations should have a competent person to perform the M&E functions and this staff capacity should constantly be built through refresher courses. This should be accompanied by the assigning of a staff to learn from the lead M&E staff (shadowing); so that, in case the lead M&E staff moves on, there won't be a gap. To further bolster this, organisations that facilitates the involvement of other staff (especially programmes staff) in the collection, analysis and utilisation of data. If done well, it will prevent

some programmes staff from taking their contribution to the M&E process as a mere 'one-off task'. should create systems that facilitates the involvement of other staff (especially programmes staff) in the collection, analysis and utilisation of data. If done well, it will prevent some programmes staff from taking their contribution to the M&E process as a mere 'one-off task'.

**Institute a robust M&E system:** The decision-making bodies of organisations should make a deliberate effort to incorporate monitoring and evaluation as a culture in the organisation. To realise this, CSOs should consciously develop M&E systems within their organisations. An M&E system (or framework or approach), comprises of a 'series of policies, practices and processes that enable the systematic and effective collection, analysis and use of monitoring and evaluation information'. M&E systems should be developed and used to create, strengthen and or sustain an M&E culture in the organisation. An effective M&E system will enable organisations to create the favourable conditions to use M&E tools, techniques and skills to drive organisational goals. Such a system will facilitate:

2. Nigel Simister, Developing M&E Systems for Complex Organisations, 2009

- Access to valuable information to inform strategic programmatic and governance decisions
- Nurturing, motivating and sustaining the required expertise within the organisation
- The timely identification and resolution of challenges pertaining to M&E planning especially the poor apportioning of appropriate time, personnel and financial resources for M&E operations
- Improved synergy between M&E team and other programmes and staff of the organisation to contribute to M&E processes and make use of learning outputs of M&E processes
- The development, definition and use of the appropriate M&E policies and processes of the organisation

The existence of a robust and functional M&E system will systematically inform the development of M&E plans that hinge on the overall organisation's M&E system or framework. Organisations can then ensure every project developed is accompanied by an M&E plan that will provide valuable data that will feed into the organisation's overall M&E framework. To facilitate the implementation of these plans, organisations should allocate a percentage of the organisational/project budget for specific M&E deliverables.

**Build team synergy:** The human factor in every organisation is very key. Organisations have the responsibility to facilitate the creation and sustenance of proper synergy between M&E and programmes teams and all staff. This will enable all staff to work better with the M&E team, serve as a valuable source of data as well as possible collectors and curators of data that will in the end, provide valuable information to inform the best strategic decisions for the organisation.

**Implement, fail/succeed, review and learn:** If all the conditions above are met and there is no active and proactive step taken to operationalise the M&E system put in place to its full capacity, organisations will not establish the usefulness of the systems and its relevance for organisational growth. It is thus imperative for organisations to work towards the operationalisation of the system to the best of their ability. CSOs should dare, succeed or fail and most importantly, draw lessons from their experiences. The derivation of lessons from this process is very essential. The depth of learning from the pro-

cess will inform and determine the extent to which the organisation would grow as a result of the process. The existence of a robust and functional M&E system will systematically inform the development of M&E plans that hinge on the overall organisation's M&E system or framework. Organisations can then ensure every project developed is accompanied by an M&E plan that will provide valuable data that will feed into the organisation's overall M&E framework. To facilitate the implementation of these plans, organisations should allocate a percentage of the organisational/project budget for specific M&E deliverables.



### Mitigation Strategy

By Jimm Chick Fomunjong  
and Franck Sombo

- 1 Recognise that M&E is essential for organisational growth
- 2 Have dedicated personnel for M&E
- 3 Institute a robust M&E system
- 4 Build team synergy
- 5 Implement, fail/succeed, review and learn



## Conclusion

It is imperative for CSOs to know what they want to achieve and 'where they are going' in their effort to contribute to social change. When this is done, it becomes easier to see the role and place of M&E in this whole process. Creating an organisational culture that embeds reflection, learning, and self-improvement will go a long way in establishing a strong footprint of the organisation within the sector and setting it apart. Streamlining M&E within the fabrics of organisational culture will play a key role in this process. Putting in place an effective and functional M&E system in the organisation will be pivotal in serving as the appropriate means to guide the organisation to take far-reaching decisions. This will undoubtedly contribute to improve organisational performance and propel the organisation into a reputable force to reckon with in the sector and to create lasting change in society.

# WACSI

Strengthening Civil Society

WACSI 2019. All rights reserved



@wacsiorg



WACSIWA



WACSI



@WACSI

