TANZANIA CSOs CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGES OF TRACKING AND DOCUMENTING RESULTS

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ABSTRACT

In modern state nations there are three major sectors namely the public, private and civil society. In developing countries like Tanzania, CSOs are at nascent stage of growth. Consequently, some stakeholders do not appreciate CSOs contribution to national development; despite its significance to citizenry welfare. The unnoticed contribution is due to weak tracking, documentation and dissemination of CSOs development work.

BACKGROUND

The civil society is becoming increasingly popular in Tanzania both within the intellectual community and the general public (Ndumbaro et al, 2007). The definition of civil society is not easy as it is a continuum from individual citizen activities to national civil society activities. Since it is difficult to have a common definition, then for one to understand what a civil society is is better to mention the major characteristics which include:

- Have free and voluntary membership
- Organizations managed by its members (though sometimes are not membership-based)
- Are autonomous, they are voluntarily formed
- Are non-partisan
- Are non-profit sharing (they may generate profit but not allowed to share among members instead they are supposed to plough back for fulfilling the organization’s mission)
- Have some form of organizational structure

Since early 1990s to date there has been a sharp increase in the number of civil society organizations in the country. This is partly due to the democratization of the governance processes and economic liberalization policy which forced the government to pull out in business and provision of some services. The gap created by withdrawal of Government was filled in by the CSOs and the private sector. CSOs are so diverse ranging from those which provision of

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services to advocacy and therefore it is difficult to devise an easy way to track the results of their work.

Dr. L. Ndumbaro (2007), Foundation for Civil Society (FCS) (2006) and others have shown that CSOs contribution is enormous but needs to be substantiated by facts and figures. To this end, if CSOs are to prove their relevance they have to invest in monitoring and evaluation so that they will be able to track and document results.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Generically, monitoring and evaluation is a continuous process of assessing the progress made from the implementation of the planned activities, output, outcomes and impact.

More specifically, monitoring is a continuous function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated resources.

Evaluation is a periodic assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and relevance of something.

It is done within the context of stated objectives.

**WHY MONITORING AND EVALUATION NORMALLY GO TOGETHER**

Monitoring and evaluation normally go together because while monitoring, as an internal process, assesses progress on regular basis for the sake of on-sport management and decision making, evaluation reflects on what has happened and is happening in order to improve the future. As such monitoring and evaluation are complimentary project management functions which together ensure that the project is running on the right track and remain there.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF M AND E IN CSOS**

Effective policy making requires information on whether governments are doing things right and whether they achieve the results intended. Strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems provide the means to compile and integrate this valuable information into the policy cycle, thus providing the basis for sound governance and accountability. M and E is therefore important for the following additional reasons:

- To establish whether the project is progressing as planned, i.e. M &E establishes whether or not the project is on schedule and within the resources, and if not, what is the problem and what should be done;
- To find out whether project outputs are useful and relevant to the development needs of beneficiaries;
- To compare actual change caused by the project against set objectives;
• Assess whether efforts are worth continuing with or there is need to adjust procedures accordingly;
• To document lessons of both good and bad practices and to enable sharing of useful information.

CHALLENGES FACING CSOS IN TRACKING, DOCUMENTING AND DISSEMINATING M & E RESULTS

According to Msuya et al. they carried out study in 2008 to establish the situation of M & E in various institutions in the public, private and civil society organizations and found that many do not value M& E as an important function in their development work. In some extreme cases they found that some CSOs do not have a monitoring and evaluation systems/plans. For those who had M and E units they normally allocate small amount of money for that purpose. In some cases the reports emanating from M and E were just put into shelves.

Accountability, Information and communication channels

Many CSOs tend to be accountable to higher authorities, that is, upward accountability. More often than not, inward accountability, horizontal accountability and downward accountability is inadequate especially to the target group and it is mainly the case in non-membership organizations. CSOs tend to be accountable mainly to donors who provide them with funds and technical assistance. Target population is just taken as subjects of the development work and not partners in development.

Poor documentation on the impact/achievements of CSOs work

Many CSOs are doing a commendable job but more often than not they fail to document good success stories and their impact exerted to the target group. One of the reasons for this situation is because many organizations are activity oriented. Once they achieve their activity targets they do not go beyond to assess to what extent such activities have brought changes (negative or positive) to the community they serve. Partly this challenge has something to do with poor planning system which does not show indicators, outcomes, data collection instruments etc.

Lack of baseline information

Some CSOs implement programmes/projects without having baseline data. Under such situations it becomes difficult to make comparison of the target group situation before and after interventions or with and without interventions.

The challenge of attribution

In some development interventions there are several development actors who sometimes serve the same community without proper coordination. Under such situations after conducting evaluation it will be difficult to tell which development actor contributed to the changes/impact of the community. A careful planning need be designed so that one could easily track each individual organization’s contribution. This could also be easy if the beneficiaries themselves are involved in setting outcome and process indicators.
Inadequate planning, monitoring and evaluation skills
Due to low capacity and skills make it difficult for CSOs to develop professional plans and subsequently prepare a sound monitoring and evaluation plan. For those who attempt to have some plans, monitoring and evaluation is not adequately done.

Some organizations confuse between follow up from M and E.

Weak networking and collaboration among stakeholders
Some CSOs tend to work in isolation from other Civil Society Organizations, private sector organizations and the government. Due to this situation in some places it has been difficult to capture good data for the CSOs working in the area. More often there is competition and rivalry among CSOs making it difficult to track changes at community level.

Human Resource Capacity
Many CSOs depend on part time staff to run the day to day activities of their organizations. There is very few full time staff making it difficult to work to optimal level of performance. In terms of education level, majority of CSO full time staff are primary education, secondary education and few university graduates. The urban based CSOs have highly educated staff than those in rural areas.

Varying levels of detailed required by different civil society organizations
The degree of M& E information differs between one CSOs and another. In such a situation it becomes difficult to make comparisons.

Managing results based monitoring system
Some of the challenges are:-

- Uneven data quality, accessibility and gaps in the M&E system
  - both availability and quality of data vary by sector.
- Weak links
  - there are currently weak monitoring systems links between the national level CSOs and their branches upcountry.
- Weak results-based management
  - The demand for evidence based decision-making is very weak. What matters with M&E is not so much the data that is collected or the facts that are available, but how the data are used to inform choices in the different stages of planning and public service delivery.
- Inadequate capacity at all levels
There is shortage of M&E skills for CSOs both at the national and local levels. CSOs will need to establish and/or strengthen M and E units and recruit specialized M&E skills, develop and manage existing skills, and reallocate roles within the existing staff.

Usefulness of information gathered from Public Expenditure Tracking System (PETS)

PETS basically measures the amount of funds received at each link of the public service delivery chain from a nation’s treasury down to the service delivery unit, where it is supposed to be spent.

By comparing how much was sent from the treasury with how much was actually received at the service delivery units surveyed by a Non Governmental Organization (NGO), one can calculate how much was lost or diverted on the way, commonly referred to as ‘leakage’. However, the challenge is not only to get more information on where the money is going, but also how to apply this information.

Commitment of staff on M and E

In some CSOs staff lack commitments to monitoring leading to delays in the implementation of such systems and little use of the Information gathered. Monitoring is seen as an obligation imposed from above, with staff mechanically completing forms and the management seeing the task merely as the collection of data for writing up reports for donors. The worst scenario is when some donors do not care about the outcomes and impact but for them what is important is to attain activity targets.

Non-involvement of the target population in monitoring and evaluation

Participatory methods in the entire project cycle management (PCM) by involving different stakeholders including target population is more effective in unearthing the impact and tracking real attitudinal and behavioral changes taking place. The conventional approach of using external people to go to the community to monitor progress and conduct evaluation without making them part of the process has proved to be not feasible as far as outcome and impact tracking is concerned.

Lack of institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation system

From my experience of evaluations I have noticed that sometimes during project planning some CSOs forget to put in the project document activities like end-of-year evaluations, mid-term evaluation and end-of project evaluation (terminal evaluation). As a result a budget is not provided for such evaluations. Therefore, much as they would like to do such evaluations they realize there is no budget for it. The best way to remember such basic evaluation is to institutionalize in the organizational operating manuals or policies such activities lest they forget during project design.

M and E system not comprehensive enough

Sometimes poor quality information is produced through monitoring as it focuses only on physical and financial aspect and ignores factors such as poverty outreach, effects and impact. More often development workers in civil society organizations are mainly focusing to achieve activity targets but
forgot important aspects such as outcomes and impact. Activities are just a means towards achieving outputs in the short-run but the longer term is outcome and impact.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the above challenges, the Tanzania Evaluation Association (TanEA) and other interested parties will try to bring together monitoring and evaluation practitioners in the country. This could be done through various ways including preparing monitoring and evaluation guidelines, organizing annual forums for M and E discussion and information sharing, building the capacity of its members and the general public in monitoring and evaluation issues. Members of the civil society organizations should be encouraged to join with TanEA. On the other hand, TanEA, using advocacy and lobbying skills should encourage civil society organizations to establish and/or strengthen their M and E units and make them more effective by institutionalizing M and E systems.

In view of the varying degrees of information generated by monitoring and evaluation, organs like TanEA should play the role of facilitating the public, private and civil society sector Monitoring and Evaluation approaches. This could be done by organizing national conferences which would involve stakeholders from the three sectors namely, the public, private and civil society.

At an international level, organizations like International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation may advocate to World Summit, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Monetary Fund, World Bank, UN agencies etc. to put in the forefront issues pertaining to Monitoring and Evaluation in all of their development endeavours.

In countries like Tanzania monitoring and evaluation is not yet an independent profession. Organizations like TanEA by collaborating with other interested stakeholders may influence the establishment of curriculum for Monitoring and Evaluation to be introduced in institutions from certificate to the degree level.

While we are putting emphasis on monitoring and evaluation we should not forget the other side of the coin, that is, the skills on planning and programme/project design.

At national, continent and global level there should be continued networking among evaluation associations and networks. The leaders of these associations and networks should encourage experience sharing and learning from one another.

CSOs should improve availability of data and information.
It is evident that, through a comprehensive data collection programme, a development agenda, the preparation of reports and wide dissemination of the findings will avail wide range of data and information

- CSOs and its stakeholders should instill discipline of transparency and accountability.

- better articulation of the objectives, clear setting of goals, identification of unambiguous indicators and benchmarks to monitor progress

- CSOs should design mechanism for evaluating the existing evaluation system (mega evaluation)

- TanEA will continue to develop code of ethics for its members so that they could adhere to quality and acceptable standard practices.

National associations/networks like TanEA should put emphasis and promote Result-Based Approach and Human Rights-Based Approach in all sectors by producing guidelines and training materials.

Using a forum like the annual TanEA conference on M and E representatives from the civil society organizations will be encouraged to institute of preparing reports and sending the same to various stakeholders including the central and local government authorities, beneficiaries and other stakeholders so that they can easily know what is going on in such CSOs and their contribution to development of the area where they work and the country at large.

Civil society organizations, the private sector organizations and the public will be lobbied to make them strengthen their M&E units where they exist and establish where they are not there. The executives of these sectors will be influenced to allocate enough budget for M and E activities and wherever possible recruit staff to man such units.

Civil society organizations will continuously asked to put in writing their success stories and disseminate to public and private sectors. Such success stories may be posted into websites and other communication media in a simplified version. Writing features in reputable popular newspapers may also serve the purpose.

Though Civil Society Organizations face the challenge of tracking their contribution to the country’s development; still there is a room to improve on various development processes through reviews so as to attain the desired results. TanEA will continue to ensure that this endeavour succeeds. Furthermore, TanEA will continue to collaborate closely with other countries national evaluation associations and networks and those at global level.

I have strong conviction that monitoring and evaluation have a big potential as when one talk about sustainable development then definitely would be talking about monitoring and evaluation.
Once the late Mwalimu Nyerere (former President of United Republic of Tanzania) said it can be done play your part!

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