

MONITORING & EVALUATION IN GLOBAL HEALTH

Advice and Tips for M&E

Mark Shepard, DrPH, MPH (Namibia)

So my name is Mark Shepard. I am the Director for Strategic Information, part of which is M&E or programs here at I-TECH, the global health department center and it's in about 25 countries that it's working in. And so, I have a doctorate of public health, working specifically in health services. I've been working with this program in Libya for about eight years now with its HIV related programs which have covered a large gamut of activities including: voluntary medical circumcision, DREAMS which was a program for prevention of HIV in adolescent girls, young women, also working with cervical cancer screening and treatment, the general HIV care and treatment for patients who are HIV infected, and also working for prevention of new infections in targeted populations using prep.

It's quite an extensive program that we're working in so I would recommend that you know people who are just starting out an M&E. Remember first of all that M&E is not research so you should really be very flexible and adaptive. Just realize that the most perfect plan will have to be regularly reviewed and revised as time goes on. Your organization or funding environment is going to determine your resources. The M&E plan itself might also have to be reconfigured and repurposed and what is or is not feasible may acquire new dimensions particularly the longer the programs that you are monitoring continue to evolve over time.

I would also say that related to this is what I call keeping close to your programs. Public health programs are not static the goals and objectives might be quite firm for a number of years but the pathway is to reach them will change over time as new evidence and best practices from other learning are introduced. These are all going to affect the designs of your tools and your M&E data collection systems, the expectations of what you're going to produce. You must keep close to those programs to understand and anticipate the changes that are coming or that are already underway.

I would also recommend that you as the M&E officer or in charge of M&E then you'd take care of your stakeholders. Those programs that you're monitoring and you're evaluating they are your customers, and they really may have very little understanding of what you do in your job but they do have expectations of what you're going to be able to provide for them. Make sure that you and your program managers work to come to an understanding of what will be produced and how the information from your M&E efforts should be made available to them and when it should be made available to them and what time frame.

I would say then another important thing that you probably need to recognize and help others to recognize is that your function in M&E is not an add-on activity it's not a last-minute thought oh yeah we need to have an M&E activity here so let's just paste it in here. It shouldn't be

considered outside of the main program then otherwise you know would get all of the attention from management and stakeholders and the funder because M&E can actually be considered its own program. It's supportive of the main program to be sure but the machinery that it requires to sustainably ensure that all of the necessary data and intelligence support to that program that they're provided that can be considerable in and of itself. You really need to be an advocate for the resources that you need to make that machinery run for you and for the program that you're supporting.

I would say also you know learn quickly from your mistakes don't be afraid of making them. Do work quickly to address them and keep moving forward. You don't have to be a perfectionist. You have to be reasonable and be honest in terms of what is and is not possible what should and should not be collected and make sure that the program and the stakeholders are all in agreement on what their expectations are. I think also related to all of these is just building strong relationships in so many instances. In the M&E of public health programs you're not working in a silo you're not working on your own on your own program you're working within an existing country's programs and systems and you're working to strengthen those systems while at the same time achieving their goals as well as your own organizations goals. This creates an inter dependency between those organizations that requires collaboration. It requires building and maintaining strong relationships really with everyone. It's really absolutely critical so without having an appreciation of your role and your capacity and what you bring to the table as a partner in achieving not only your own objectives but those of the partners with whom you work you can become isolated and even your access to critical data can be challenged or obstructed. Those are what I would suggest to any new person coming into the M&E field at least keep those things in mind.