

## Advancing Good Governance Seminar

7 June 2013 – 9:30 – 11:00 AM

### Impact Measurement and Accountability

This session presented the findings of a draft research paper entitled “*Monitoring and Evaluation in the Social Sector*”, commissioned following discussions on this topic at the 1st Advancing Good Governance Seminar during the breakout session entitled “*Do Good Governance and a Results-Driven Approach Mix?*” in June 2012. The research paper is authored by Mirjam Schöning and Pamela Hartigan and presents the outcome of an exploratory, hypothesis-generating research effort involving thirty national and international social sector organizations. A number of the participants in the research attended the session and were able to provide further insights and perspectives, sharing experience and best practice.

Monitoring and impact evaluation is by no means a new phenomenon in the social sector, and every actor in the development sector has a view on the benefits, features and necessity of monitoring and evaluation (“**M&E**”). The paper focuses on the main drivers behind M&E practices; what gets measured and how often measurement occurs; the methodologies used; how feedback is gathered and provided back to clients; the process of reporting to donors and investors, including the differences between them; and the resources invested in the M&E process and how these are incorporated into organizational learning.

#### Key Points from the Session

- 1. No regional patterns and few sector patterns emerged concerning the main drivers behind M&E practices.** Despite the broad range of sectors and geographies represented in the sample, few differences in approach to M&E were observed on the basis of sector of practice or physical location. The most salient differences were between INGOs and social entrepreneurial ventures. More than 80% of INGOs surveyed stated that external demands from key financial sources were a significant influence behind enhancing and expanding their M&E activities, frequently turning on the size of grants being provided and the type of donors supplying the finance. The inverse was true for social entrepreneurial ventures: 70% reported that they were primarily driven by internal factors in enhancing their M&E activities, almost always linked to the founder’s mission and purpose in setting up the organization in the first place, and therefore reflective of an intrinsic desire to evaluate achievements.
- 2. Translating M&E results into organizational learning is a challenge that faces both INGOs and social entrepreneurial ventures.** M&E has both external and internal purposes. INGOs often measure outcomes to satisfy external funders, but the qualitative tests focus on impact: the hypothetical “what might have happened” in a given situation without that INGO’s contribution or involvement is difficult to measure, but is nevertheless critical to demonstrate value. Social entrepreneurs are frequently employing innovative models in their organizations and therefore need M&E to prove their methods. As smaller organizations, constructive M&E often drives the desire to scale up and the results become a useful tool to persuade policy-makers with tried-and-tested solutions.
- 3. M&E is not a one-way street.** For all organizations, M&E must be a “closed loop” and should not simply be conflated to learning. A critical component of good governance is accountability to (a) investors and/or donors; and (b) to clients/beneficiaries, which involves providing

feedback to both these stakeholder groups. At the same time, the production of M&E reports should not simply be a box-ticking exercise: M&E data must be listened to; it must be used to improve practices and products; and it must be used constructively to enable and empower.

### **Emerging Questions**

1. For larger organizations, client/beneficiary feedback remains critical, but how can a truly representative feedback sample be achieved? How can bias be avoided and/or simply superficial feedback where there are millions of beneficiaries in scattered places? Is it possible for an organization to be too big to properly gather informative and reliable data?
2. How do we support and handover the power to be change agents to the beneficiary/the client, the local organization or community network? They are the eyes and ears, “in the shoes” so to speak, to assess real impact. We may have state-of-the-art methodologies to assess outcomes or outputs or impact, but how does this translate in the field? How do we bridge the gap between the academic community and the reality of the front line, INGO world? What practical steps can be taken to get credible and affordable survey techniques owned in the field?
3. How can we provide collective feedback in a constructive manner to the larger donors/funding agencies that place restrictive, onerous and rigid reporting requirements on organizations receiving funding and encourage a different, but shared approach that yields more qualitative and purposeful information for each side of the equation?