Empty rituals? A qualitative study of users’ experience of Monitoring & Evaluation systems in HIV interventions in Western India

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The ‘Business’ of HIV in India

- HIV prevalence low in global terms 0.36% (NACO website, 2016)
- Programs delivered by civil society clusters referred to as Non-Governmental Organizations & Community Based Organizations (NGOs /CBOs).
- Avahan an ‘effective management model’ (Rau, 2011; Avahan, 2008)
Structure, delivery & expectations of HIV programmes

**National level:**
NACO/Avahan

**State Level:**
SACs/ State Lead Partners-Monthly, quarterly & bi-annual reporting

**Local Level:**
NGOs/CBOs – monthly & quarterly reporting

**Grassroots workers:**
peer educators-daily reporting
Problematising M&E


- Encouraging a focus on measurable outcomes to the neglect of more long-term and hard-to-measure outcomes.

- Data quality & trust of people at ‘the sharp end’

- Performance indicators ‘mirror reality’?

- The constitutive power of indicators creating reality (Erikson, 2012; Lorway & Khan, 2014; Mawdsley, Townsend, & Poter, 2005)
The M&E Avatar’s

- Health-system issue-HIV incidence /prevalence rates
- Technical issue- developing ‘right indicators’ for behaviour change communications, clinical outcomes
- Achieving ‘high quality’ data

What’s missing?

- How M&E is implemented at grassroots level?
- How it is experienced by frontline workers?
- Frontline workers insights on M&E
Methodology & sample

- A qualitative ethnographic research study (part of larger data set, collected for PhD)
- Western India - high prevalence state covered by Avahan & NACO Targeted interventions
- 6 focus group discussions with NGO workers
  - totalling 51 participants from different NGOs
  - staff comprising of sex workers & non-sex worker members
- Ten interviews with donor representatives
  - 5 government & 5 philanthropy/ I- NGO
- Thematic Analysis conducted (Attride-Stirling, 2001)
Findings

- Overwhelming similarity in both donor and NGO workers perspectives on M&E. Critical about purposes of M&E, e.g. choice of indicators
- Acknowledge the rhetoric roles of M&E-financial accountability, programme effectiveness and improving programme through learning and feedback (Green & South, 2006; Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, 2003; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991)
NGO views: M&E useful

- Valuable & transferable skills
  ‘I have learnt a lot from this funding agency, my documentation skill has improved, my presentation skill improved, I met several new people, I will never say that I did not get a chance to learn from it. I learnt a lot.’

- Evidence of credibility
  ‘... I feel good, I work honestly, I feel proud, and I work sincerely, and because I work sincerely and that [this] output is reflected [in the monitoring] ... the data that is generated in it, the good side of it. What I was able to achieve I am proud of my work ...’

- Good public image for NGO
  ... there is [value], we can present it to visitors, particularly those who come from outside, the sort of work we do. Or when we have to take any new project we can show the work we have done so far. Because it is in a written format ...we can show it. It is good in that way.
However, real work of empowerment & solidarity could not be reported in current M&E

- Relationships built during the course of program implementation, and the trust earned, gave a sense of pride particularly the respect gained from community members, their families and other stakeholders.

- Examples of the real work done by the NGOs:
  - NGO workers raising funds for a HIV-positive member to help sustain them until they attained an ART (anti-retro-viral therapy) registration.
  - Aid the rehabilitation of a sex worker, one willing to leave the business and helping her to marry a person of her choice.

- And yet:
  
  "...if it is ticked mark then it becomes a format, and how can you put feelings in a format?"
Use of coercion

- Adopting ‘unfair’ strategies in programme delivery - to achieve targets
- Involvement in financial (mal?)practices and ‘creative accounting’ - to manage limited resources or function within rigid donor protocols

“... that brothel owner very honestly told us, that if they threaten [sex workers] in the name of police what can we do?.... today by simply using the word `police’ their no’s were transformed into `yes’, and those women [community] immediately agreed to what NGOs were asking them to do. So ultimately what is achieved in all this? So should we really say that this is voluntary testing? ...If you use that [pressure] then you would be able to double, triple targets.”
Over-reliance on incentives

- Approving strategies & approaches

  “See madam, when we asked [Senior managers in a private charity] **something that would help to increase the number of patients**, then TCI [a private charity] **used to sanction it immediately** ...We used to get, tent, games [board games, entertaining games].”

- Providing incentives - expensive hotels

  “... **some gifts, or the doctors at the doorstep...or food is given**. All that you can give there is funding! [A]nd when that is not there then why should we[community] come to you?

  *What would we get in return? This is a big hazard in this ...”*

  NGO staff were concerned about the diminishing trust and rapport with the community because of the use of these ‘gaming’ tactics.
Donors views on M&E

➢ ‘Monitoring is our job!’

“... Yeah, monitoring and evaluation is required; I mean one thing is that where exactly is money pouring in. What is the output that is coming out? Is the NGO achieving the objectives which is in tandem with the overall objective or mission or goal of the donor agency so all those things are required, so monitoring is needed. .. Then third is the sharing ... so if you do not monitor you would not come to know what are the best practices in a particular NGOs, in that sense monitoring and evaluation is really helpful...”

➢ Financial accountability & transparency
Donors views on M&E...conti..

- Huge amount of data- limited use for programme learning & scepticism towards NGOs

  R: If I am a worker with an NGO, and I know my boss wants to hear that the moon is black then I say that the moon is black.[DI-7].

- Targets are problematic

- Choice of indicators- insensitive to local contexts

  R: It should not be that today is Tuesday; it is positive people’s day. That is, without saying, you have said it [revealed the HIV status of those who attend]. This should not happen, it is a common programme of ICTC [integrated counselling and testing centre], and in that you invite everybody. [DI-2].
Discussion

• Discrepancy between intended and practiced M&E
• Achieving targets, showing program impact and (mal?)practices go hand in hand
• Learning as a purpose of M&E ignored
• Worker’s motivation, recruitment & retention
• Process needs to be valued- trusted/buy-in for ‘data quality’
• Improving targets & M&E practices.
Thank you!