



ACFID-RDI Network National Workshop, 28 August 2018

Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact Across Scales

Facilitated by Dr Keren Winterford (Institute of Sustainable Futures, UTS)
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Outcomes Statement

Summary

ACFID and the RDI Network convened a workshop to discuss the implications of significant trends that are shaping monitoring and evaluation practices in NGOs and driving demand for demonstration of outcomes and impact across scales:

- **Changing donor landscape:** Shift from charitable donors towards self-directed donors, often with an investment mindset, interested in scalable impact. Along with this, the sector is also experiencing diversification of financing mechanisms with new reporting requirements.
- **Increased focus on collective impact** towards shared goals, such as the SDGs.
- **Technology that is revolutionizing the world of data**, including transformation of data storage; fragmentation of the data landscape; vast improvements in our ability to share large volumes of data; and data analytics and AI capabilities that enable rapid aggregation of data from multiple sources.

The workshop heard from three speakers who each gave a short talk to challenge the group and imagine the future. Workshop participants from NGOs, Academia, Government and the Private Sector worked with six future scenarios to identify the challenges and opportunities to improve the sector's ability to better demonstrate outcomes and impact across scales.

The workshop focused on stretching the sector into the future, asking:

- *What does the future look like where we are demonstrating impact across scales?*
- *What do we need to do to get there?*

Facilitators drew from informing research¹, papers and resources to sharpen participants' expectations of the demands of today and into the future.

Lightning Talks

Peter Baynard-Smith, BlueBike

Introduced the trends in data analytics and how technology can help us aggregate data at scale in what is an increasingly fragmented data landscape.

Grace Rose-Miller, Yarra Valley Water
YVW is working with local councils, state government and at community level across different sectors to achieve outcomes. They've framed their strategy around the SDGs.

Chris Roche, La Trobe University
Monitoring and evaluation activities are inherently political, and issues of power are potentially exacerbated when operating across scales. What are ways of thinking and working politically that need to be considered when demonstrating and communicating impact across scales?

¹ See Hall, J (2017), [Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact Across Scales](#). ACFID and RDI Network. Available on ACFID's [website](#).

Scenario	Key insights and questions arising
A scenario that re-imagines MEL practice to strengthen and demonstrate civil society's contribution to impact across scales.	If we really are committed to evidence, then we need to be committed to learning together about how change happens and using/applying that learning together, safeguarding and prioritising local learning and knowledge. What happens in the power balance in a democratised MEL space?
A scenario that reimagines MEL practice of small NGOs to effectively collaborate, contribute to and demonstrate impact across scales.	We imagine a world where marginalised communities are empowered by collaboration and partnerships. In the future where data is everywhere and accessible, how do we connect in to those reflective moments? How do we make sure there is participation? How do we have positive outcomes for less powerful actors?
A scenario that reimagines MEL practice in a world where the donor and data landscape is fragmented .	Looking at other sectors - business communities, governments – learning from them and leveraging from them. Thinking of the emerging markets, growing populations – this is where the money will be made in the future. Recognised the tension: localisation v change institutionally for the sector.
Scenario that reimagines MEL practice across diverse development actors to effectively collaborate and demonstrate their collective impact towards collective goals, such as the SDGs.	Learning, including a licence to fail, is essential for effective collaborative outcomes. 'Demonstrating' impact doesn't go far enough as it is tied up in power dynamics whereby demonstration is largely only for donors, as opposed to impact being integrally linked to and servicing the needs of community. Are data clearing houses a possible way to share success and failure between actors?
Scenario that reimagines in-country MEL practice across development actors to demonstrate and promote progress towards SDGs.	There's a discussion about access and ownership to data and the potential for in-country actors to check veracity and how it is used in their name. Could international exchanges of people with similar interests be a galvanising advocacy strategy?
Scenario that reimagines MEL practice of development actors to optimally leverage technology to demonstrate impact across scales.	There are big changes coming for MEL. With emerging technology, real time monitoring can be a reality and we can imagine the specific monitoring function becoming redundant whilst evaluative thinking remains necessary. What are the potential risks around data security and ownership?

Next Steps

The ACFID DPC and RDI Network will explore a range of options in advancing the dialogue on strategic approaches to proving, improving and promoting effectiveness in development work. Specific opportunities which arose from the workshop discussion and will be considered include:

- Sharing with a broader cohort of ACFID members and RDI Network members – sparking new ways of thinking about MEL
- Engaging senior leaders in the wider sector (CEOs and senior decision makers) in the conversation about strengthening the evidence base and whole-of-organisation contribution to change across scales
- Refocussing M&E training/learning to support the development of strategic and collaborative learning and evidence agendas

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