

CASE STUDY

Weaknesses in monitoring practices in relation to performance and accountability principles: promoting joint monitoring could be a solution in developing countries

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This article discusses monitoring capacity in the education sector of developing countries to meet the demands of the Ministry of Education for evidence-based data to meet performance and accountability principles supported by the Open Government partnership. This article is based on a case study in a developing country that illustrates an example of limits of monitoring practice characterized by a lack of financial and human resources and also an uncompleted decentralization process. It concludes with original recommendations based on internal dynamics that promote joint monitoring processes and practices to improve monitoring capacity for employing Open Government principles in local development and to strengthen monitoring and evaluation capacities at a national level.

Keywords: monitoring practices; performance; accountability; education sector; schools; open government; developing countries; developing countries

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), monitoring is a continuing function that uses the systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and improvement in the use of allocated funds. Performance monitoring defines a continuous process of collecting and analyzing data to compare how well a project, program or policy is being implemented against expected results. Performance monitoring implies performance measurement that means a system for assessing performance of development interventions against stated goals.

Launched in 2011, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims for enhanced transparency, accountability and citizen engagement by driving national level government reform. According to these principles, OGP is a global initiative to promote transparency, accountability, citizen empowerment, fighting corruption, and encouraging the use of new

technologies to improve governance. As such, OGP is a coalition of Governments, citizens and civil society organizations working together to advance transparency and accountability across the governance spectrum. To meet local demands for greater civic participation, the Partnership is sponsoring an OECD initiative to help countries in transition become eligible for inclusion into the OGP. In addition, government bodies must improve monitoring and evaluation to increase performance of local development policies.

A monitoring framework in the education sector of a developing country

The case study is illustrated by the monitoring framework of the Ministry of Education in a developing country. The national education policy has two major goals:

- Goal 1. Universal access to education. The purpose of education policy is education for all from primary to high school; and
- Goal 2. Promoting quality education at all levels of the education process.

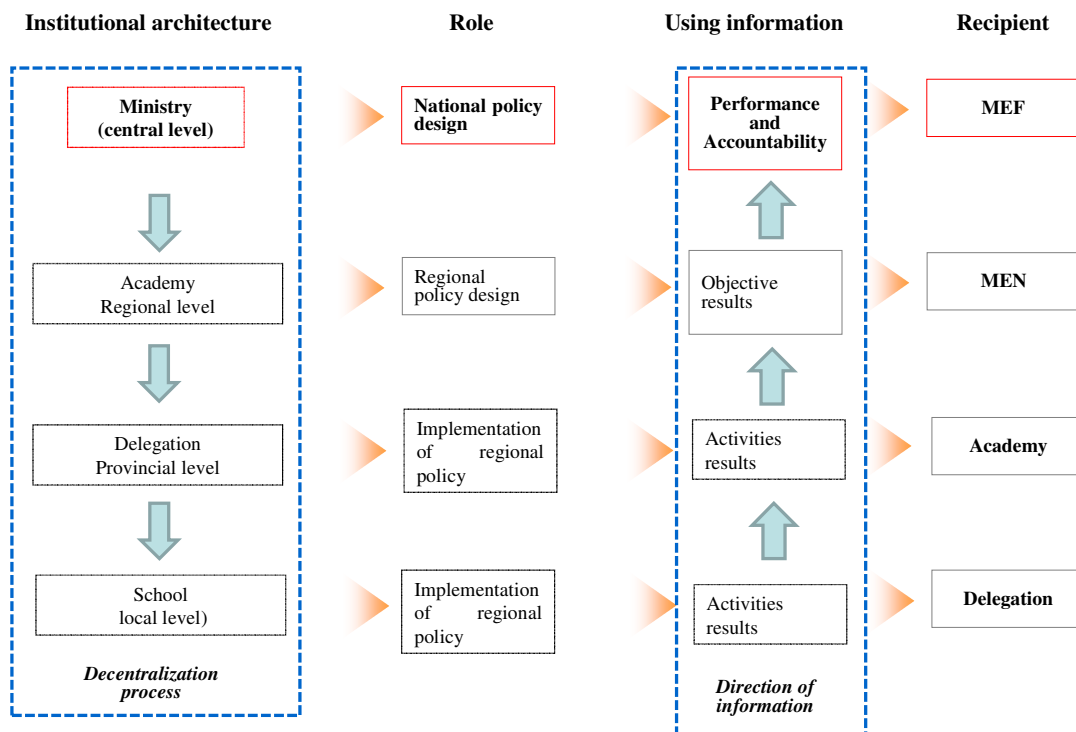


Figure 1. Type of data required by government bodies, depending of their own capacity to implement the sectorial policy

To reach these goals, monitoring frameworks reflect two different purposes. The main purpose is to measure performance and efficiency of interventions implemented through national policy. At this stage, main indicators are sectorial and should be measured through national statistical mechanisms. The second purpose is to use data to satisfy the principles of accountability based on observed results.

Design of institutional monitoring framework

The circulation of data is strongly influenced by institutional organization. The purposes and roles of actors are clearly defined theoretically. Figure 1 shows the type of data required by government bodies, depending of their own capacity to implement the sectorial policy: the different level of decentralization of government bodies influences the role of and need for data at each level of authority.

The Ministry of Education (MEN) is responsible for the identification of national objectives. Data needs are based on the level of achievement of objectives of implemented national policy. This is a strategic monitoring exercise. Either data is used to define new sectorial objectives, or through the measurement of the level achievement of objectives, data is used to illustrate the performance of the Ministry. In this case, data is used to satisfy accountability requirements. Therefore, the recipient is the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

The Academy is responsible for fitting national objectives into a regional context. As well as the Ministry, information is used to identify the level of achievement of national policy objectives in a regional context. In practice, the Academy provides strategic monitoring in that data informs regional policy design through the adaptation of national policy in the regional context. The recipient of this data is the MEN.

In the provinces, the delegation office operates monitoring of the implementation of regional policy. Data is generated through operational monitoring practice whose purpose is to show results at provincial and local level of actions implemented in the regional policy framework. At the local level, the school is responsible for the implementation of actions. The purpose of data generated through monitoring practice is to inform school management and delegation offices about the level of implementation of actions. The recipient is the delegation office in the province.

The main weaknesses of the institutional framework

The national framework suffers from three major weaknesses:

- Quantitative and qualitative deficit of human resources at each institutional level: central, regional (academy), provincial (delegation) and local level (school);

- Decentralization process not completed: Roles and entitlements of institutional actors are not clearly defined;
- Gap between financial resources available and needs: Insufficient for the implementation of education policy.

The lack of human resources in academies has consequences on the functional organizational structure of the academy and delegations. Depending on the size of the lack of human resources (the latter is qualitative and quantitative), functional organization is an adaptation of institutional weakness to supplement its needs. Such a situation results in existing staff being required to take on extra work and responsibilities which may be outside of their area of expertise and terms of employment. Thus it follows that the organization is characterized by the heterogeneity of sectors but with equivalent operational structures, that is, academies and delegations. The range of organizational structures is such that some regional governments have no counterpart services at the provincial or regional level. This poses a difficulty in terms of monitoring arrangements to the extent that the circulation of data is not uniform from one region to another or from one delegation to another within the same region.

The result at regional and provincial levels is that monitoring arrangements are limited by the proliferation of sources for gathering data produced by different administrative units. This is also the case in the processing and dissemination of data. The data is not homogeneous and is unreliable because it is not collected according to standard processes shared by all parties. The data collection system is not effective in giving a coherent overall vision, as well as detailed evidence of the performance of the education system. One consequence is the absence of a genuine sectorial coordination of regional structures at regional (academy), provincial (delegations) and *a fortiori* at local (school) levels.

In addition, local authorities do not have sufficient budgets and the central administration (Ministry), because of the lack of resources, cannot support them with the financial aid necessary to implement initiatives in accordance with their needs. Legal restrictions do not allow them to divert their resources. In this context, an incomplete decentralization process reinforces existing difficulties in the institutional structure. In addition, the gap between needs and what the service is able to offer is increasing due to population growth. These factors have a limiting effect on monitoring practice.

The process of atrophy within the education framework

These limitations contribute to a situation in which regional actors (academies and delegations) privilege investment in infrastructure at the expense of funding for pedagogical activities. The latter require more resources, specific qualifications and thus results are more

difficult to measure. So there is tension between the activities implemented within the delegations, that is, between the academy that focuses on infrastructure and activities implemented by the schools. As shown in Figure 2 below, regarding the qualitative aspects of education, the school appears to be isolated as it is obliged to respond to the weaknesses of the institutional framework through the development of diverse and short-term *ad hoc* initiatives:

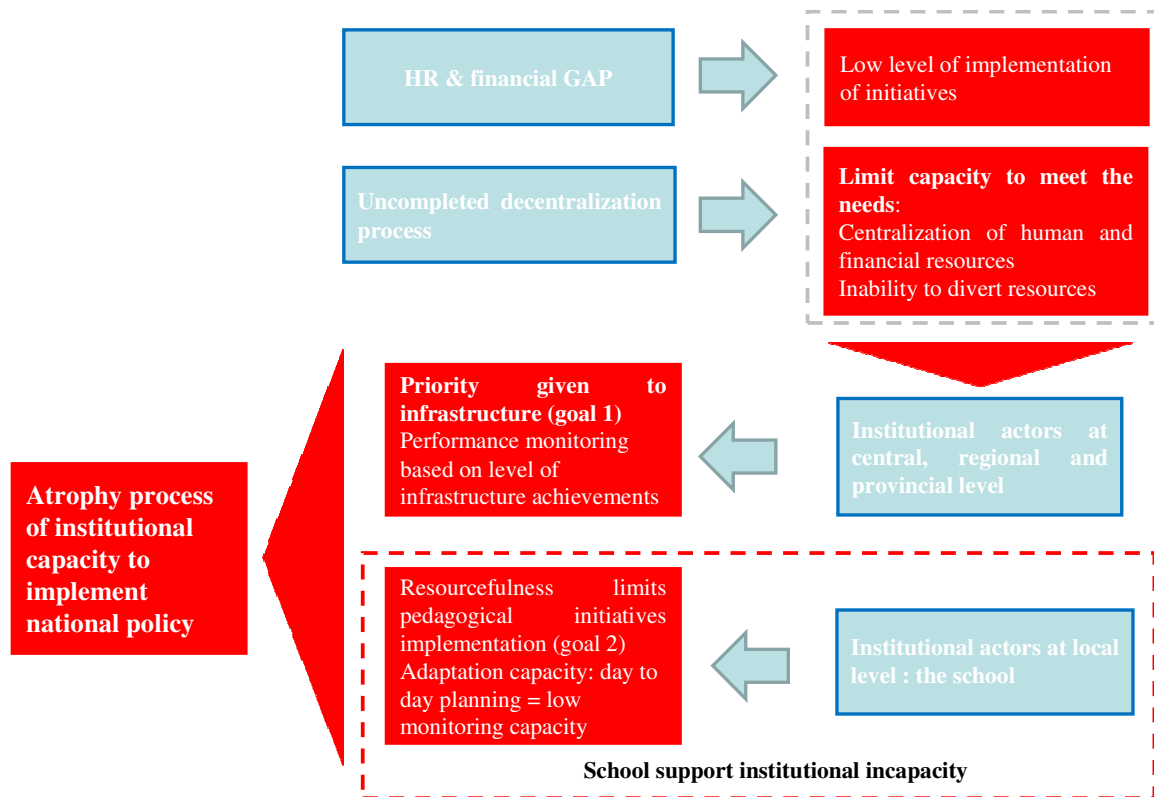


Figure 2. Schools’ response to atrophy and institutional incapacity

At the end of this process, the school appears to be the only player that supports itself within what is in effect a malfunctioning system. In this context, the available data drawn on by institutional partners focuses on the objectively generated evidence relating to the level of achievement of infrastructures. The outcome of these weaknesses is the atrophy of the capacity of the institutional framework to deliver quality education. More specifically, the low level of professional expertise of teachers does not allow for needs to be met at a local level. This suggests the need for schools to improve the quality of education through pedagogical development activities.

Development capacity at a local level: the school

In this context, schools are unique actors in charge of the implementation of pedagogical initiatives to meet the unmet needs of teachers. In view of the limited capacities of schools, implementation of some activities is supported by international donors and civil society actors. As shown in Figure 3, institutional weaknesses limit the capacity of schools to implement pedagogical development initiatives and place the burden of responsibility on them to find strategies to compensate for institutional limits:

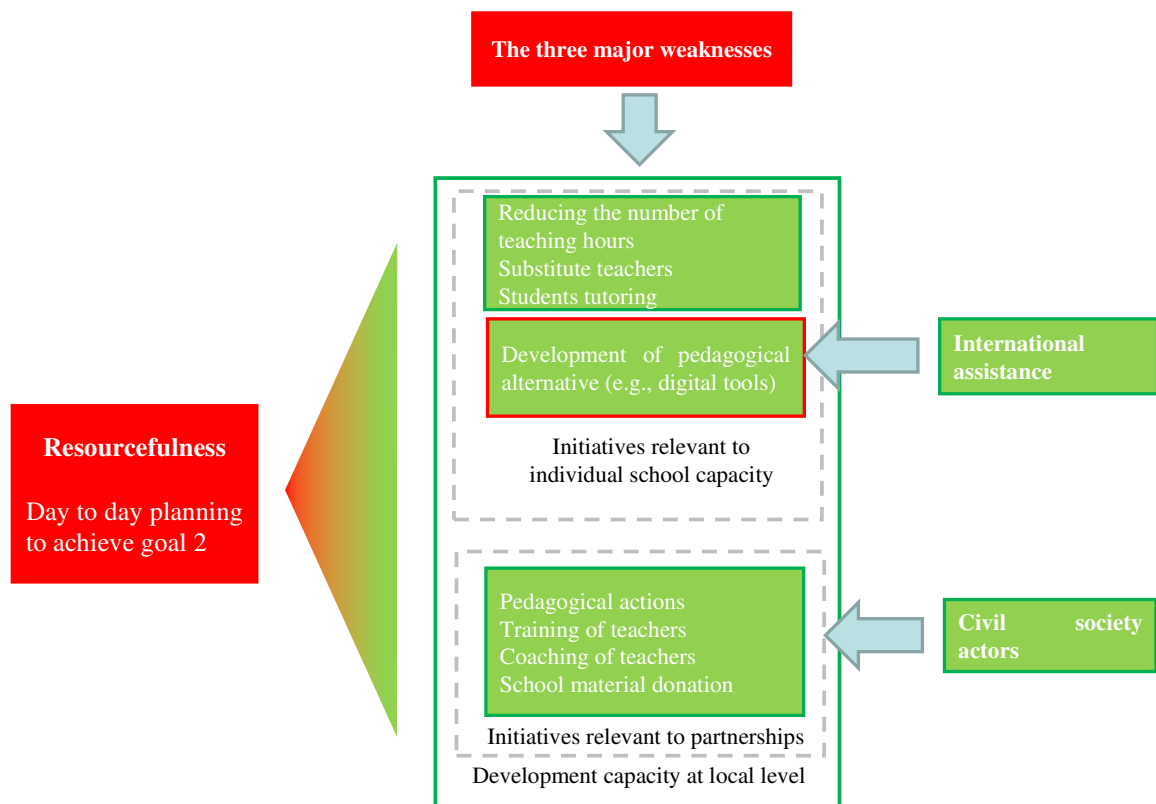


Figure 3. Schools’ institutional weaknesses

To meet the educational needs of children while being understaffed, school strategy is based on limited strategies like reducing the number of hours of instruction or the replacement of failing teachers in one domain by other teachers who have no initial training in their field of education. In order to adapt to oversized classes resulting from a lack of infrastructure, but also to compensate for the lack of equipment, the alternative preferred by schools is to encourage teachers to use digital media to promote the active participation of children. To do this, teachers develop their own media to give a pedagogical methodology in their teaching.

Schools also benefit from occasional outside support, which takes the form of partnerships with foreign schools, charities or private organizations to develop training programs for teachers, or to provide equipment. However, schools are not able to monitor such provision due to the lack of resources and expertise.

The consequence of weaknesses in monitoring practices

The consequences of weaknesses are various:

- Weaknesses in monitoring practices further decrease the capacity to implement education policy and reduce the institutional framework capacity to implement national policy.
- At a regional level, evidence-based data is focused on infrastructure since it is easier to evaluate impact in this area. The limited capacity of schools and the lack of development initiatives that promote educational improvement provide insufficient evidence for effective monitoring to take place. Furthermore, monitoring is restricted to infrastructure for the accountability purposes of goal 1.
- In this process, actors at the local level (schools) are isolated. Schools have a limited capacity to improve the quality of education (goal 2). Actions implemented are not regular and opportunities are reduced in relation to needs. Their capacity for monitoring is limited. As a consequence, low monitoring capacity implies facing difficulties from one day to the next. Schools must take each day as it comes and the situation makes short term and medium term planning impossible.
- The overall efficiency and effectiveness of intervention is reduced by poor planning and monitoring resulting in weakness.

Conclusion of case study

In this case study monitoring practice does not allow the use of data for accountability and performance purposes because it is not based on the evidence produced regarding the quality of the education system (goal 2). Data is limited to sectorial and infrastructure indicators. Institutional actors are more likely to implement a monitoring system based on activities which they feel can be tangibly measured: infrastructure and some sectorial indicators. In this case study, monitoring of sectorial policy limits the capacity to express accountability. The impact of weakness can be reduced through joint monitoring processes and practices. This should be implemented as a transversal development approach through regional development policy. Moreover, to reduce the negative impact of system weaknesses on performance monitoring, it is essential to complete the decentralization process.

Exploring solutions

Exploration of recommendations

This example shows us that lack of capacity reduces monitoring practice and *a fortiori* the volume and the quality of available data. If it is not possible to increase the capacity through an increase in financial and human resources, it is possible to improve it through the reduction of weaknesses. To do this, the approach consists of combining efforts and joining forces with other Ministries to limit the impact of weaknesses in the education sector.

It is necessary to transfer sectorial monitoring in education to a transversal approach like regional development policy that includes economic and social development indicators to benefit complementary human resources and an efficient organizational setup. In this way, monitoring of the education sector is realized through the monitoring of regional development policy. Monitoring becomes multi-sectorial. Apart from benefits obtained through better monitoring and higher quality of information, there are two main consequences:

1. Firstly, to adopt a transversal monitoring approach and to make sectorial monitoring a component of monitoring policy, which (in this case study) reduces the influence of the Ministry of Education since the data produced is not directly under its supervision.
2. However, in the medium and long term, the higher quality of available data increases the ability to design policy and conduct effective strategic and operational monitoring at a sectorial level. This is a condition to build evidence based policy.

In order to proceed within this approach it is necessary to adopt a common matrix and identify realistic indicators even if their number is limited. This approach also implies some changes in the structure of dialogue through a mutual consultation with actors involved in the implementation of the multi-sectorial development policy.

The necessity of a common matrix and realistic indicators

In a low capacity country, it is necessary to restrict the disparity of information collected but also analyzed. The adoption of a common matrix requires to jointly define indicators with the involved ministries but also with donors. Identification of indicators must take into account weaknesses in terms of human capacity and financial resources. It is essential that information can be available to inform each indicator used. Production of data must be integrated into the statistical system prevailing in the country to collect data, both at the local levels and at the national level. Finally, it is important that there is, for each indicator used, a reference value to appreciate progress during a pre-defined period.

The necessary changes of the structure of institutional dialogue

Firstly, objectives, indicators and results must to be identified through mutual consultation including government bodies and civil society actors. Mutual consultations call for the setting up of a series of functional coordinating bodies. Several countries have established operational clusters allowing continuous dialogue between partners and government. An example provided by Menocal and Mulley (2006) is Vietnam. This country has established a Partnership Group for Aid Effectiveness chaired jointly by donors and the government, in which all stakeholders meet once a month. This group became the first dialogue forum on aid effectiveness between government and donors in the country. This is all the more remarkable given that that the group includes all aid sectors (representing about USD3 billion per year in 2006). The same authors mention Afghanistan where a monthly coordination meeting chaired by the Minister of Finance was set up. It allows donors and the government to review progress and discuss problems. Drawing from these best practices, a donors and ministries committee could be established to maintain a regular dialogue so that sectorial dialogue is not limited to biannual missions, but is permanent.

The Tanzanian experience

The Tanzanian experience through the creation of a Development Partners Group (DPG) is another response to weak monitoring capacity. Since it was formally established in 2004, the DPG has been working with the Government of Tanzania and other domestic stakeholders to strengthen development partnerships and raise effectiveness of development cooperation. Nowadays, DPG comprises 17 bilateral and 5 multilateral (United Nation counted as one) development agencies providing assistance to Tanzania. The approach to aid management in Tanzania is guided by the Joint Assistance Strategy (JAST) and takes into account the international principles of aid effectiveness. The main focus of JAST is to promote national ownership and government leadership in development cooperation through joint intervention that seeks to enhance the impact of development effectiveness.

The DPG includes several sectors and thematic groups to facilitate the coordination of its members. The DPG has a central mission schedule to promote coordination and prepare a mission plan published on the DPG website to facilitate the coordination of development partners' missions. In the case of Tanzania, the establishment of large sectorial approaches (implementation approach encompasses all sectors considered by the National Development Strategy) also stimulated joint missions through general budget support, mutual fund baskets and other common measures of financing. Through their representative agencies, individual donors have decided to encourage coordinated missions to produce joint studies, data collection and analysis. This practice is supported by sectorial working groups and thematic working groups implemented in the country.

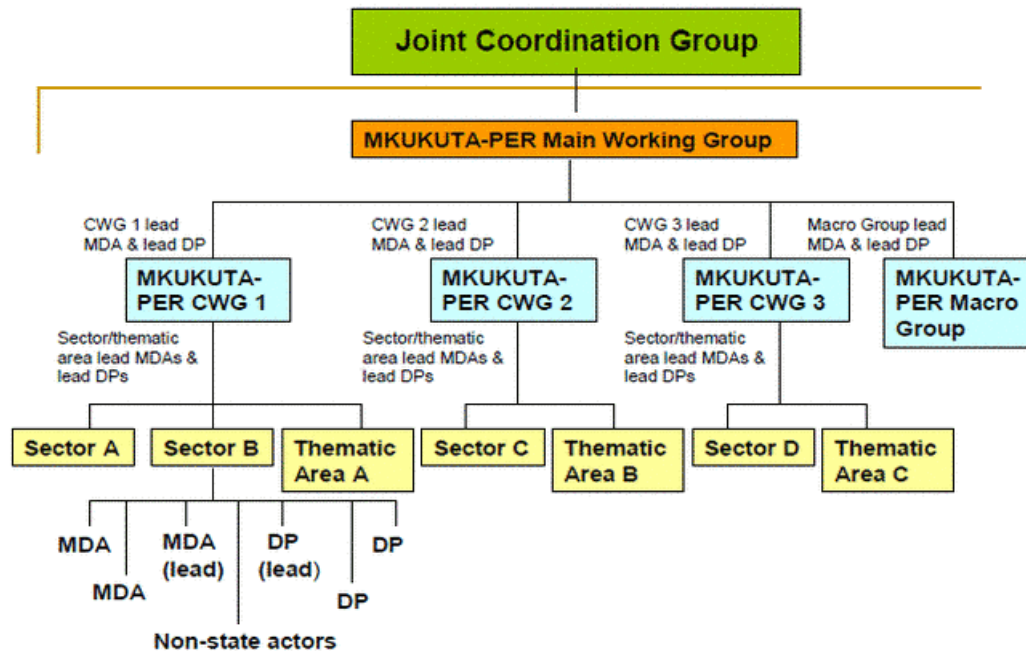


Figure 4. The structure of the national dialogue (Source: <http://www.tzdpg.or.tz/dpg-website/aid-effectiveness/national-dialogue-structure.html>)

This is a significant step forward in terms of aid effectiveness. The approach has been facilitated by the willingness of donors to work together through the DPG. In addition, this coordination has been heavily promoted by the government and facilitated by the decision of a number of donors to delegate more responsibility to their country offices based in Tanzania. In 2008, the Tanzanian government has adopted a new structure for dialogue led by the Government, which guides coordination among the latter, development partners and national stakeholders. Nowadays, the implemented monitoring and coordination system integrates all operations in a single structure, while allowing the government to retain control of internal dialogue. To realize this, the structure that defines the National Dialogue in Tanzania is based on a pyramidal structure with four levels:

- The first level, comprising one or more sub-sectors features a thematic working group (dealing with problems that can be overlapping). This first level of data analysis is technical;
- The second level is the working groups cluster: data is centralized and synthesized within a sectorial and thematic working groups. Data is analyzed at the level of sectorial policy;

- The third level is illustrated by a core working group called “MKUKUTA-PER” which is multi-sectorial and cross sectorial. Data analysis is consolidated to measure the level of achievement of multi-sectorial development policy;
- A fourth level (highest level of dialogue) is illustrated by the Joint Coordination Group, which includes all partners and representatives of the Tanzanian government. The work of the JCG is complemented by an informal forum for dialogue, the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), chaired by the Government’s Chief Secretary and attended only by a selected number of Diplomatic representatives (at Ambassador-level). The National Dialogue takes the following structure (Figure 4).

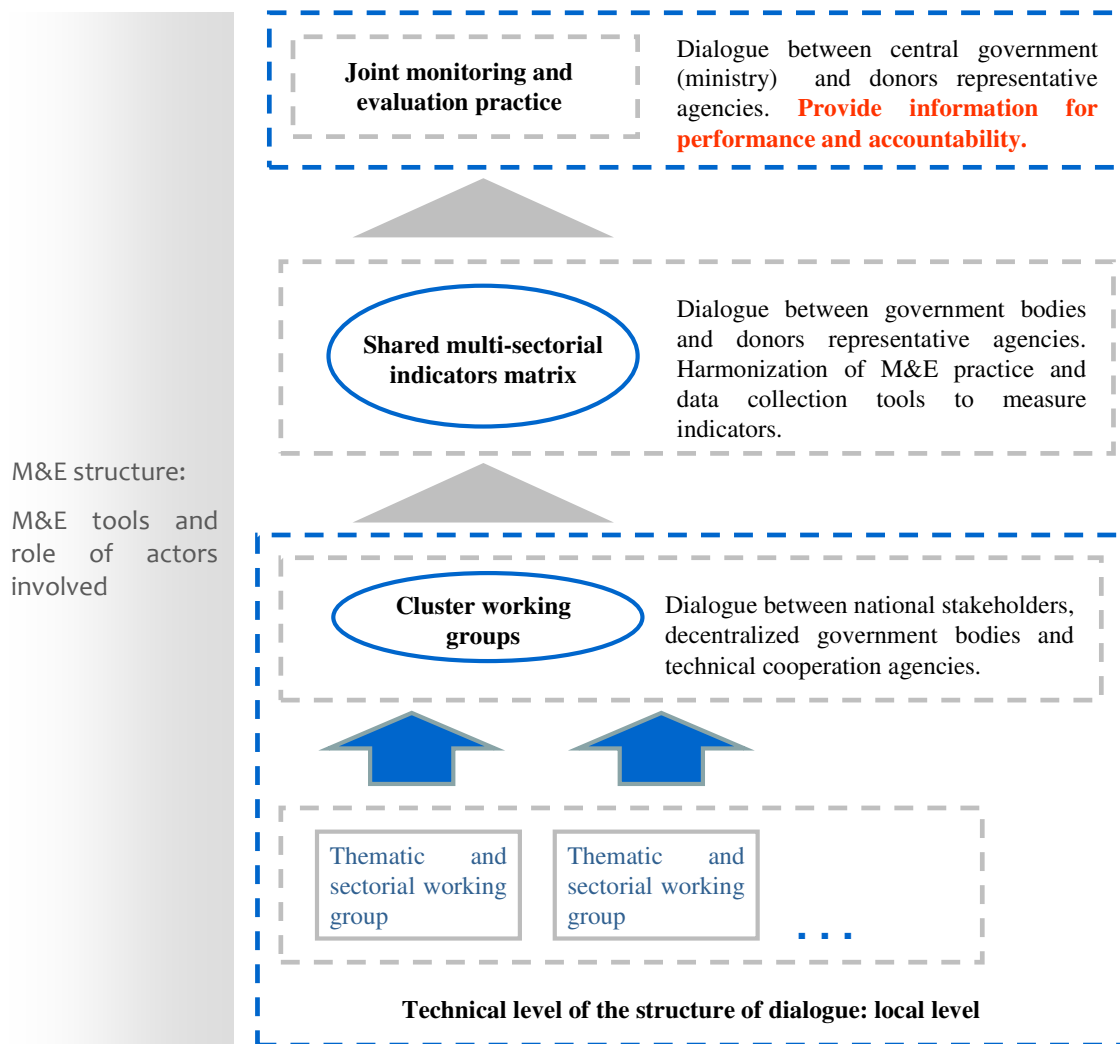
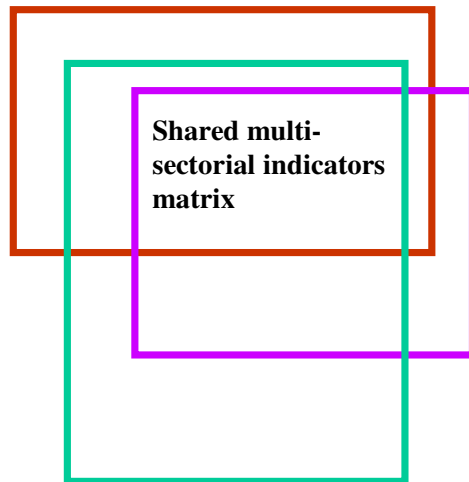


Figure 5. An adapted M&E system

The advantage of this structure is to improve the practice of monitoring and consequently to produce data available to meet the principle of accountability and performance. Secondly, the interest is to improve the effectiveness of aid implemented in the country. The DPG structure is based on an open coordination structure for all development partners. Indeed, there is no doubt that the greater the number of partners integrated within the structure, the more data can be produced and shared, and the more efficient monitoring becomes. The advantage of such a structure is to link data available for operational management (technical level) and data available for strategic management (policy level) and so to strengthen transversal strategic planning and coordination.

Such a structure of dialogue based on multi-sectorial monitoring approaches is not systematically transposable to many low capacity countries, due to some characteristics of the context and the level of risk for donors. Nevertheless, this example provides an alternative to limit the weaknesses shown through the case study developed in this article. In this proposal, the direction of the information provided through the M&E system comes from the field (local actors) to the central government (ministries). So, information goes from the bottom to the top. As shown through Figure 5, the shared multi-sectorial indicators matrix plays a key role in the M&E structure. Indicators are proposed by local actors through thematic and sectorial working groups. There are validated by the cluster working group and proposed to be a part of the shared multi-sectorial indicators matrix. For each indicator it is necessary to identify a reference value to measure the progress made over a pre-defined period.






-  Education sector matrix indicators
-  Rural development sector matrix indicators
-  N sector matrix indicators

Figure 6. Sectoral indicators

As illustrated by Figure 6, in this approach the number of sectorial indicators that constitute the matrix is lower than in traditional sectorial approaches. However, their targets are realistic, and sources and data to measure them exist because they are produced by working groups including all national stakeholders at the local level. Consequently, data collected and analyses are more reliable. This is a condition for joint monitoring and evaluation practices to reach a level of analysis sufficient to meet the principles of accountability and performance.

General conclusions

What lessons can we learn from this article? I have argued that in a low capacity country designing an efficient M&E structure to meet performance and accountability principles calls for a combination of both internal dynamics and international assistance. Therefore the improvement of action plans does not rely solely on international support. To do this, it is necessary to become more ambitious. Despite possible difficulties at a sectorial level, this means choosing a multi-sectorial rather than a sectorial monitoring and evaluation structure.

The success of this approach is directly linked to the ability of sharing risks between national governments and international donors. In the medium term, this proposal could reinforce aid effectiveness and directly enhance the attractiveness of the recipient country for donors through reliable information regarding performance and accountability. In the long term, these two elements should contribute to obtaining more financial aid and to increasing the financial and human capacities of the country to implement social development and sectorial policies.

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