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Developing a participatory impact assessment approach and action research culture within a communication for social change organisation in Nepal

Long summary of a paper presented to the Perspectives on Impact Evaluation: Approaches to Assessing Development Effectiveness International Conference in Cairo, Egypt on 2 April 2009

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Introduction

This paper presents a case study and learnings from an ongoing research project *Assessing Communication for Social Change (AC4SC): A New Agenda in Impact Assessment*. Communication for Social Change (CFSC) is an approach that advocates the participatory definition of community communication constraints and information deficits and posits a shift from vertical to horizontal communication (Figuroa, et al., 2002). The approach focuses on the creation of dialogue and has become influential in reorienting communication for development interventions towards community involvement and ownership. Though influential, the model offers few concrete insights into operationalising it within an organisational setting. So, whilst a community driven and focused approach to stimulating social change is advocated, methodologically many media organisations are ill-equipped to deal with the methodological, logistical and analytical challenges that implementing the CFSC approach presents.

In seeking to address the implementation challenges associated with the CFSC approach, the AC4SC project is developing, trialling and rigorously evaluating a participatory impact assessment methodology for assessing the social change impacts of community radio programs produced by Equal Access – Nepal (EAN). In doing so it builds upon previous development communication projects that have used the ethnographic action research (EAR) methodology (Skuse et al., 2007; Tacchi et al., 2007). The EAR approach advocates continuous, contextualised and deeply qualitative research as critical to the project cycle, and can be seen as offering a potentially adaptable methodological platform for analysing and assessing social change as it relates to the media output and outreach activities of organisations such as EAN. A key aim of the project is to establish an organisational culture within EAN that values and supports the development of such methodologies and which engages in continuous action learning and improvement.

Challenges in building an evaluation culture in development organisations

A literature review has highlighted the following challenges, issues and barriers to successful evaluation capacity building (ECB) within non-government organisations (NGOs) and developing countries.

- **Organisational culture, dynamics and context:** For effective ECB, organisations need a readiness for organisational learning from evaluation and the environment and context of the ECB initiative needs to be conducive to success (Forss et al., 2006; Naccarella et al., 2007; Taut, 2007). Factors that can hinder learning from evaluation, include ‘lack of transparent communication and decision-making, lack of managers as models of learning, lack of reward for innovation and learning from mistakes, and a largely missing collaborative culture’ (Forss et al., 2006: 138).
- **Effective leadership:** Several studies demonstrate the need for leaders and managers to support ECB and evaluation, and to be seen as strong models for learning (Forss et al., 2006; Khadar, 2003; Taut, 2007; Valery & Shakir, 2005).
- **Differences in power, knowledge and status:** The degree of conflict and cooperation among organisational networks with different levels of power, knowledge, status and expertise has an impact on ECB and evaluation activities (Cracknell, 2000; Taut, 2007)
- **Expectations of funding agencies:** Most evaluations in developing countries are donor-driven. However, donors often require the use of more traditional forms of evaluation that are often

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inappropriate for the local context and community-based programs (Lennie & Tacchi, 2007). In addition, there is a basic incompatibility between the aims of accountability and lesson learning from evaluation (Cracknell, 2000).

- **Identifying appropriate tools and approaches:** There is a lack of agreement among developing countries about appropriate evaluation methodologies, and a lack of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools that meet the specific needs of community-based programs (Khan, 1998; Napp et al., 2002).
- **Developing a wide range of skills:** As well as technical skills in evaluation, a particularly wide range of skills are required for effective participatory evaluations and action research (Boyle, 1999; Hearn et al., 2009; Taut, 2007). Developing and retaining staff with these skills can be difficult for NGOs (Napp et al., 2002; Valery & Shakir, 2005).
- **Loss of champions and turnover of key staff** with evaluation skills undermines ECB efforts (Lennie, 2005; Napp et al., 2002). This is a problem when programs have short-term or erratic funding.
- **Data and data systems:** Weak skills and capacities in evaluation methodologies and poor quality data systems have an effect on the quality and credibility of evaluation data.
- **Communication and feedback systems** within organisations, the communication processes and language used in an ECB initiative, and literacy and language issues in the community, are key issues, particularly in ECB and evaluations conducted in developing countries (Khadar, 2003; Valery & Shakir, 2005). While feedback is crucial for 'linking evaluation to the planning process', in most developing countries such arrangements are 'either absent or weak' (Khan, 1998: 313).
- **Time, energy and resources:** A basic issue for ECB is that the institutionalisation of evaluation needs 'a number of years of sustained intervention' (Boyle et al., 1999: 11). In addition, due to the time and resources required, concerns have been raised by some community-based organisations that evaluations can compromise program delivery (Napp et al., 2002).

Benefits of using a participatory approach to evaluation capacity building

Participatory and collaborative forms of evaluation and impact assessment have been found to be very effective in building evaluation capacities in organisations and in community participants in developed and developing countries. Valery and Shakir (2005: 87) suggest that participatory approaches are particularly appropriate for ECB in complex settings where the context is 'impossible to manage', such as those often found in developing countries.

Other benefits and strengths of participatory and action research methodologies for ECB include:

- adopts a 'learning by doing' approach which is recommended for adult learners
- flexibility of the process and its responsiveness to change in the organisational context
- aims to create equal partnerships between evaluation participants, to use democratic and inclusive processes, and to produce various forms of empowerment
- can help to foster ownership of the evaluation process
- can generate mutual trust and understanding between management, staff and community participants and development of a shared vision and shared program objectives
- can increase utilisation of evaluation results and recommendations
- can facilitate better decision making, program improvement and sustainability
- can provide rapid feedback about the success or failure of an ECB intervention
- can be a cost-effective method of ECB (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005; Forss et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2009; Lennie, 2005; Mayoux & Chambers, 2005; Papineau & Kiely, 1996; Taut, 2007; Valery & Shakir, 2005).

However, participatory evaluation methodologies can require significant time, energy, resources and commitment to be effective. In the context of developing countries, their use presents certain challenges, which we will discuss further later in this paper.

Developing a research and evaluation culture through ethnographic action research

The *Assessing Communication for Social Change* project is adapting the EAR approach which has been used and further developed in several media and communication projects in South and South

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East Asia over the past six years (Hearn et al., 2009; Skuse et al., 2007; Tacchi & Kiran, 2008; Slater & Tacchi, 2004; Tacchi et al., 2007). EAR aims to build the capacity of media initiatives in developing countries to monitor and evaluate and then improve practices as part of their ongoing development. It aims to be a rigorous, holistic approach that combines participatory techniques with an ethnographic approach in an ongoing action research framework. Ethnographic methods are used, such as participant observation, in depth interviews, and immersion in research sites (see EAR training handbook at <http://ear.findingavoice.org>).

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Communication initiatives are seen as part of the larger 'communicative ecology' in a community that is made up of communication and information channels and flows which function within complex and shifting local contexts. The approach also focuses on community members' access to information and technologies and the capacities of community members to engage in communication initiatives and to take action to facilitate social change. EAR researchers adopt a variety of roles, including encouraging program staff and community members to become actively involved in the research and evaluation process, and fostering a research culture within their organisation.

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The Assessing Communication for Social Change project

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The AC4SC project is a partnership between Equal Access –Nepal, Equal Access–International, based in San Francisco, a research team from the University of Adelaide and Queensland University of Technology, local stakeholders and radio program listeners, and a network of trained community researchers in Nepal. The project started in April 2007 and runs for four years. Key aims of the project are to design and trial a participatory methodology for evaluating the social change impacts of two popular radio programs made by EAN, and related outreach activities; and to strengthen evaluation skills, capacities and systems within EAN. A further aim is to develop more appropriate, locally-defined indicators of social change (for more information see Lennie & Tacchi, 2007; Lennie et al., 2008).

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The project has been developing and adapting the EAR approach to assess whether it can become a whole organisation approach, rather than the responsibility of an individual EAR researcher. We are also setting up systems and processes that will integrate an EAR-like methodology into the operations of Equal Access, across a range of different people and roles, from community researchers to M&E staff, to program makers and management. This aspect of the project builds on previous training in and use of EAR undertaken by Equal Access - Nepal staff in earlier research projects.

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The two radio programs, and their associated outreach activities, that the impact assessment is focussed on are:

- Saathi Sanga Man Ka Kura (SSMK) (Chatting with my best friend) - this innovative youth-oriented program was the first in Nepal to be made by young people for young people. It presents a mixture of drama, information and listeners feedback and seeks to improve life skills, prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, and empower young people through informed choice and decision making.
- Naya Nepal (New Nepal) which is aimed at peace-building and reconciliation following the ten year armed conflict.

These programs have spawned a large network of listener clubs around Nepal. There are currently over 1,300 SSMK clubs and nearly 200 Naya Nepal clubs. Club members engage in discussions about issues raised by the programs, then conduct activities such as street theatre, community forums, and letter writing in an effort to increase knowledge and awareness of social, health or political issues and to facilitate social change.

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Evaluation culture and activities and challenges prior to the project

Context in Nepal related to evaluation

A stakeholders workshop was held to launch the AC4SC project in Nepal in April 2007. The following summarises some of the key evaluation challenges and issues experienced by participants involved in development communication in Nepal:

- A research culture that includes everyone (not just researchers) needs to be developed.
- Lack of M&E understanding at all levels of a project.
- Lack of cross critiquing of programs by ‘competitors’ (there is a lack of confidence to share ‘bad’ results).
- Lack of sharing of program content - a clearing house for information is needed.
- Projects manipulate data to please donors and so valuable information gets lost.
- Identities and rights of marginalized communities and their voices should be the focus of M&E.
- Need to move away from a focus on the causal relationship between the communication initiative and its impact. However, information is needed from communities that shows how the content of communication is contributing to change.
- The complexity of the media environment must be taken into account when looking at indicators and impact. However, donors lack an understanding of the complexity of measuring social change impacts and the time and resources required to do this effectively.

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In addition, there is a lack of acceptance of the importance of evaluation due to accepting everything as fate or ‘natural’ rather than requiring investigation into a problem. This is because Nepalese people are not taught to question things or to take the type of critical approach used by evaluators.

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Other contextual challenges in Nepal include:

- The extreme poverty: in 2004 31% of people in Nepal were assessed as living in poverty, mainly in rural areas (DFID, 2008)
- Major communication and travel problems, due to wide cultural and linguistic diversity, mountain terrain and poor roads. Internet access is fairly limited outside the Kathmandu Valley. In addition, ongoing political instability and discontent in the country frequently involves strikes that include disruptions to the transport network. These communication and travel problems greatly affect outreach and field research work.
- Gender and power issues due to the low status of women, the hierarchical caste-based culture, and the sensitivity of certain topics such as sexuality and reproductive health. These issues present a considerable challenge to implementing participatory methodologies.

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Evaluation culture within EAN prior to the project

There was a lack of leadership in evaluation within EAN before the AC4SC project began. The organisation had no M&E manager and only a small M&E team. Feedback systems within the organisation were poor and a more coordinated approach to coding and data analysis was needed. Indicators used to assess program effectiveness and impact were developed without community input and many of them were seen as unrealistic. EAN was often reliant on time-bound studies and ‘success stories’ derived from listener letters and feedback. However, this data tended to come from literate listeners and was therefore not very representative of the listener population.

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Community reporters and listener club facilitators received some training in M&E but no follow up training was conducted due to lack of funding. A few staff had received training in EAR but there was no system in place to effectively analyse this data, provide feedback on it, ~~or~~ and to make effective use of it. Content staff therefore did not see this data as adding value to their programs. ~~Most staff thought that EAR was not used very well in their organisation and they had not been able to demonstrate its usefulness to stakeholders.~~ In addition, large numbers of listener letters ~~and other feedback were~~ being received about the SSMK program which indicated that the program was highly successful. The feeling of the SSMK team was therefore ‘why do we need to evaluate the impact of our work?’ ~~As a result, most staff thought that EAR was not used very well in their organisation and they had not been able to demonstrate its usefulness to stakeholders.~~

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Steps and strategies to develop and implement the impact assessment methodology and build evaluation capacities

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The AC4SC project has used participatory action research, an ongoing meta evaluation of the project, and participatory evaluation methods that incorporated various interactive capacity building activities. Key steps and activities have included:

- **Critically reviewing existing M&E capacities, systems and practices:** This involved analysing existing research and evaluation capacities and needs, and a detailed analysis of the organisation and working practices as they related to M&E activities. Both the M&E and content production staff wanted to improve their skills in a wide range of M&E methods, including group discussion, facilitation, interviewing, and coding, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.
- **Building an evaluation team:** A few months after the project began EAN employed an M&E Coordinator and an M&E Officer. The positions of two field based staff were also redefined as M&E Associates. They have taken significant responsibility for the project's M&E activities, including scoping studies of the four case study communities, regularly supporting and mentoring community researchers to improve the quality of the data they collect, and monitoring outreach activities.
- **Developing the methodology:** Based on a literature review, possible steps to conducting the impact assessment and developing participatory indicators were developed. Definitions of key concepts such as 'participatory monitoring and evaluation' (PM&E), 'impact assessment', and 'social change' were also collaboratively developed. Our initial ideas were continually refined and revised, based on face to face discussions, online feedback and discussion on the project's interactive website, and by teleconferences and email.
- **Understanding the local context and audience:** The research team and EAN staff undertook regular fieldwork visits to gain a first hand understanding of the local contexts and issues and the local people involved. This included visits to the case study sites selected to trial the methodology.
- **Developing and reviewing strategies to improve M&E systems:** Various strategies to strengthen and improve EAN's M&E systems were collaboratively developed and implemented. They included identifying 'missed opportunities' for more effective and consistent uses of M&E data, including triangulation of qualitative and quantitative information, and developing stronger data management, reporting and feedback systems. We critically reviewed these strategies on a regular basis, then developed new or revised strategies and processes as necessary.
- **Building capacities and shared understanding:** An initial series of workshops were conducted with M&E and program production staff in late 2007. They aimed to build capacities in using specific EAR tools, and to help staff to better understand PM&E, and processes such as developing indicators, and managing, coding and analysing qualitative data. Relationship-building exercises, small group work and shared facilitation were used in an effort to develop effective working relationships, mutual trust and understanding, and to generate a sense of ownership, interest and involvement in the project.
- **Identifying four 'sentinel' case study sites,** based on various criteria.
- **Identifying and training the community researchers:** Eight community researchers in the four case study sites were selected. In May 2008 EAN staff conducted basic training with the community researchers in facilitation and using the range of participatory tools that would enable qualitative impact assessment and contextual data and feedback on programs to be collected, managed and reported on. More advanced training was provided in late 2008.
- **Developing the community researchers' toolkit:** A basic manual and toolkit for community researchers were developed in April 2008. A much more detailed version of this manual was produced in late 2008. Feedback on these manuals was gathered from the community researchers.

Key challenges and issues

Developing the methodology

Most EAN staff and community researchers involved in the project provided positive feedback on the initial capacity building and training activities. However, a few months after the staff training the research team received feedback that the level of complexity (of methods and frameworks) was leading to confusion and few staff could articulate what the project was about or what it was trying to achieve. Two senior staff expressed a preference for a methodology that was 'much simpler and practical'. M&E staff also raised concerns about how they could deal with large volumes of qualitative field data effectively and efficiently.

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Improving communication and cooperation between M&E and content staff

One of the most important outcomes of the training workshops was improved 'team building', 'team spirit' and communication and appreciation of the need for a 'culture of sharing' among EAN staff. However, a critical review of M&E systems in June 2008 identified that while the Naya Nepal team was cooperating well with the M&E team, the SSMK team was seen as 'resistant' to changing the way it does M&E since they thought their current system was working well. They had also been reluctant to provide content themes to the community researchers in case this affected the number of listeners. M&E staff thought that the SSMK team was very insulated and not open to others entering their group. They tended to only contact the M&E team when they wanted a survey prepared or specific data collected. However, the SSMK team needed to obtain data immediately to inform their weekly letter review process.

Human resource problems

There has been a regular turnover in M&E Coordinators since the start of the project two years ago, with the third M&E Coordinator appointed in December 2008. This has created problems with continuity and time spent in bringing each new coordinator up to speed with all the facets of the project. Only the first M&E Coordinator took part in the initial staff training. This situation has also put pressure on remaining staff who had less time to devote to the project. Other key staff members have also left or taken maternity leave for several months. This has affected progress with key project activities such as developing a master code book and more effective coding, analysis and reporting systems.

Data and research quality

Much of the initial data collected by the community researchers was unfocussed, lacking in depth, and of variable quality. It also needed to be much more connected with the radio programs. While they understood most of the EAR tools quite well, several of them reported that tools such as 'Cause and Effect' were difficult to understand. Their research and facilitation skills were also variable in their effectiveness.

Communication, travel and electrical power problems

As well as problems with travel due to the many strikes in Nepal, there have been some ongoing communication problems. Poor quality phone systems in Nepal have affected the quality of teleconferences held to discuss and plan project activities. Regular translation of research data and materials has taken up also considerable time and resources. Since late 2008, Kathmandu has experienced major load shedding and currently only receives about four hours of electricity per day. This has significantly hampered progress with the project.

Strategies used to address these challenges and issues

As well as the strategies described earlier, such as the ongoing meta-evaluation of the project, the research team also used the following strategies in an attempt to address the various challenges and issues that emerged.

Developing the methodology

Following the feedback about the complexity of the methodology, a decision was made to make the process more streamlined and immediate in terms of outcomes. We also decided to focus on more general social change indicators that the CFSC model is associated with, such as increased dialogue and inclusion of excluded groups, and to use the community researcher data to work towards more context-specific indicators informed by participatory data collection. Attempts were also made to

better ground the approach in the content and objectives of EAN's broader development programs and to more clearly link the participatory research process to these particular areas of media output.

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Improving communication and cooperation between M&E and content staff

Strategies have included:

- Having the M&E staff and content staff work together on developing theory of change matrices for each radio program
- Conducting a workshop in which the SSMK and M&E teams looked for openings within the program production processes to discuss M&E findings emerging from the community researcher network
- Introducing the Most Significant Change technique (Davies & Dart, 2005). The aim was that this would increase meaningful connections between the M&E and content staff through the story selection process, and help to raise awareness of the value of the work of the community researchers and the M&E team. The content staff expressed enthusiasm and interest in using this technique.

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In addition, monthly meetings are planned that will involve the content and M&E teams reviewing the community researcher data, including and listener feedback on program content. The content teams have indicated that they are keen to obtain this data on a regular basis.

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Data and research quality

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Strategies to improve the quality and focus of the community researcher data included:

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- Developed templates to improve the research data and reports.
- Developed a much more detailed Community Researcher manual. The community researchers have reported that they found this more useful since it included many more examples and tips, and more detailed descriptions of various key concepts, methods and tools.
- Conducted regular follow up visits to each case study sites to review the work of the Community researchers and provide feedback, advice and support
- Encouraged the community researchers to phone their mentors on a regular basis to share their progress and any problems they had.
- Encouraged the community researchers to contact each other regularly to share their experiences and reports. This has helped them learn from each other.

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Some key learnings and outcomes from the project

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The AC4SC project has highlighted the complexity of the process of developing and implementing a participatory impact assessment process in Nepal. The research team identified the need for EAN staff to think more critically about their work, and their assumptions about the value of M&E data and the importance of the work of the M&E section. Bringing the content and M&E staff together to develop theory of change matrices was useful in beginning the process of developing this critical capacity.

Despite the many challenges and issues that have emerged, in general, the project has been effective in building capacities in participatory research and evaluation and generating an appreciation of the value of an EAR-based and participatory approach to the assessment of communication for social change interventions. Developing the numerous skills required and setting up more effective data management, triangulation, and reporting and feedback systems has taken a considerable time and effort, and this work is still ongoing. However, this is essential before good quality data can emerge. For the research team this process has required taking time to provide regular feedback on such things as report templates and M&E reports, and giving support to M&E staff. Team members also needed to make regular visits to Nepal to maintain motivation and interest in the project.

[While the ongoing meta-evaluation of the project was very important to critically reviewing and then improving project activities and M&E systems, we identified a danger in placing too much reliance on](#)

positive feedback from successful ECB workshops. For instance, only a few months after feedback had been received that most EAN participants understood the project well, many of them found it difficult to clearly articulate what the project was about and expressed confusion about the various methods and systems that had been proposed. This highlights the need to gather a wide range of feedback from different participants in an ECB initiative and to encourage participants to be very open and honest about the things that are not working well.

The complexity of the CFSC model, with its focus on media interventions stirring dialogue and creating the impetus and self-efficacy for social change implies a research focus on aspirations of social change, what is said about constraints to social change and shifts in public opinions, social organisation and patterns of inclusion. Observing and tracking social change demands a deeply qualitative and participatory approach, yet the ability of organisations such as EAN to roll out the complex participatory M&E systems that the CFSC approach demands is fraught with constraints such as lack of and turnover of M&E human resource, irregular supply of electricity, frequent strikes that hamper travel, as well as natural disasters that impede travel and the regular flow of data from community researchers.

A key learning from our attempt to implement a PM&E system capable of capturing the subtlety of data demanded by the CFSC approach is that the model may be better suited to niche community media interventions than large-scale national broadcasting interventions. However, findings from earlier development communication projects which have used ethnographic action research suggest that having an organisation which is flexible and willing to learn and change in response to research findings is more important than the size of the organisation (Tacchi & Nair, 2008). Sustained funding for this work can, however, be a challenge. Since it takes a number of years to set up a proper functional M&E system with trained staff in place, it is important to ensure the provision of longer term funding up front for such projects. In the AC4SC project many changes to approaches have come about as a result of constant learning, and which this can have resource implications. For a small organization such as EAN with limited funding, keeping the funding stream open to emerging costs can be a challenge.

The project also demonstrated that, as Jallof (2005) has shown, community members can be trained to collect useful qualitative data about the impacts of community radio programs. However, there is a need to ensure that community researchers are very clear about the context and focus of this research work. They also require continuous mentoring and support, and both formal and informal training to increase their capacities and the quality of the data they collect. Effective feedback systems are also needed to maintain motivation and to share learnings and examples of good quality data. This process can take over a year or more. While the fledgling community researcher network requires further capacity building, the four sentinel sites and eight researchers there are starting to generate deeper qualitative insights into social change and constraints to change. Inevitably though, where the CFSC approach is implemented on a national basis the data emerging from such sentinel sites must inevitably be extrapolated to stand for social change more broadly, which remains problematic in a context as politically, culturally and ethnically diverse as Nepal.

Further, working in the caste-based Nepalese context requires an awareness of the gender, power and status issues that have an impact on the effective use of participatory impact assessment methodologies and methods. The outcomes of the project also suggest that issues related to organisational and professional culture need to be understood and addressed before collaborative relationships between certain staff can be improved. For example, the M&E team at EAN was seen by the content production team as somewhat subservient to them. As a result, the M&E team was not empowered to take a strong role in content production and was not effectively used as a resource within the organisation. However, strategies such as the M&E staff presenting useful evidence of program impacts and community feedback on radio programs to program staff were effective in raising the status and profile of the M&E team. The introduction of the Most Significant Change technique and monthly meetings to review the community researcher data is expected to further assist in this process.

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One of the changes that the project has brought about is that the content production teams now have more faith in the M&E team. This is evident from the more frequent meetings between the two teams, more instances of requests by the content teams for more information on a-particular topics, and for analysis of data to triangulate with data and information from focus group discussions. Communication between the M&E and content teams has increased and there is greater participation by one team in meetings of the other. A culture is also evolving in which the content team is realising the important role of M&E in providing information that is useful to their work.

~~While the ongoing meta-evaluation of the project was very important to critically reviewing and then improving project activities and M&E systems, we identified a danger in placing too much reliance on positive feedback from successful ECB workshops. For instance, only a few months after feedback had been received that most EAN participants understood the project well, many of them found it difficult to clearly articulate what the project was about and expressed confusion about the various methods and systems that had been proposed. This highlights the need to gather a wide range of feedback from different participants in an ECB initiative and to encourage participants to be very open and honest about the things that are not working well.~~

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Learnings about creating an evaluation culture in development organisations

Both the literature review and the outcomes of the AC4SC project have produced a number of valuable learnings about creating an evaluation culture in development organisations. They include learnings about the importance of leaders being committed to the process, and the need to build a learning organisation and a collaborative organisational culture, based on mutual trust and understanding. Other learnings include:

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All relevant staff need to be involved in ECB activities: Management, program staff and M&E staff need to take an active part in ECB activities so that evaluation is not seen as solely the task of the M&E section. This can help to reduce the impact when key staff members leave the organisation.

ECB initiatives need to be flexible and open to change: Building an evaluation culture and a learning organisation requires a sustained effort over a number of years. The design of ECB initiatives must be flexible and open to change or revision, based on regular feedback from staff and stakeholders.

Good communication and feedback systems are important: The language and forms of communication used in ECB need to be appropriate and clear to all staff. Definitions of key concepts need to be clarified and agreed to by all relevant staff as early as possible. Feedback systems need to be well thought out and timely so that they can be used to improve programs and evaluation systems most effectively.

The value of evaluation needs to be actively demonstrated to program staff: Program staff may be reluctant to spend time and energy on evaluation due to the pressure to develop or deliver programs within a set timeframe and budget. They may also be reluctant to change evaluation systems which they believe are working well. The best way to address these challenges is to actively demonstrate the benefits and value of the ongoing evaluation of programs to program staff.

Keep participatory evaluation methodologies simple and practical: In the initial phase of the ECB initiative, it is important to keep participatory methodologies, and research and evaluation methods and systems, as simple and practical as possible. This will help to reduce any confusion or lack of motivation and interest among staff and community participants, and increases their usefulness and effectiveness. However, as Lennie (2006) points out, it is important ensure that participatory evaluations, and the methods and data collected, are also rigorous and trustworthy.

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