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SEMINAR

ON

RESULTS BASED BUDGETING:
OBJECTIVES, EXPECTED RESULTS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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Check against delivery

Response on

Building clear objectives, SMART expected results and relevant performance indicators

The aim of our projects is to bring about change, and this, to me, is what impact means – change. Whether it is legislation, institutional capacities, judicial practice, training methodologies, mindsets, and so on, we have to have thought carefully about the change we want to see in order to be able to formulate the results and the indicators.

We have heard how indicators oblige us to clarify how much, how many, by when, and so on. Both the expected results and the indicators should be realistic and manageable and they should cover only what is within our control. If the expected results are clear, then it is easier to do the indicators. The expected results should show what we are going to achieve, not what we are going to do.

Now this all sounds very well. The problem is that for any of this to be useful, we need a baseline and a target. It helps if we identify milestones, but if we do not have the baseline data, any information will always be a subjective assessment or an interpretation of the situation. Very often the way we proceed, the easy way out if you like, is that we make the indicators measurable but internal to the project. This was described very well by Ms Besrest in her intervention. Unfortunately this creates a risk that the indicators simply become a list of outputs.

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I should say as regards definitions that in the many PMM trainings we have done and in our daily project work, we refer to the need to have SMART indicators, and to expected results which should be relevant, realistic and achievable. However, I do not think this hampers the discussion. Ideally both should be SMART and relevant.

We continue to find it very difficult to formulate measurable indicators which are external to the project. Let me give you a few examples of the types of indicators that we use for capacity building:

First of all, we have simple quantitative indicators. These would be the number of capacity building days, number of events, types of participants, etc. They relate to the project outputs.

Secondly, we have qualitative indicators that are internal to the project. This is for example satisfaction with the training as such, i.e. the quality of the output; or perceptions of how the knowledge acquired or the law adopted will be used in a way that could result in change.

Often we use a combination of these two types of indicators.

Thirdly, we have qualitative indicators that are external to the project. This would be actual change, such as modifications to judicial practice or a higher number of cases benefiting from legal aid, and so on.

Going through our current and recent projects, I have not found any indicators which are external to the project and SMART at the same time; they may be external but then not measurable – or cannot be proven to be the result of the project.

This problem applies regardless of the sector, but maybe in particular in the field of human rights assistance. In the countries where we work, it is difficult to get access to meaningful baseline data and even if we have such data, we need the resources and ability to actually measure the difference made by the project. We would need to collect the necessary information for example about sentencing or about resort to pre-trial detention for certain charges. And then we would have to be able to attribute any change to the project. So far we have had neither the resources nor the project expertise to do that.

A possible solution might be at the level of the project design, where we could build the impact assessment into the project. In other words, the project would not be finished until the impact has been assessed. This raises a problem of timeframe though, because the change may not be apparent immediately.

Another option we are looking at, but have not tested yet, is to place the responsibility for showing that there has actually been an impact with the beneficiaries, i.e. to insist on ownership and build that into the project.

For the indicators, we would in that case include in the project the collection of baseline data, for example as part of a needs assessment or a feasibility study. The data collected would be the basis for finalising the logframe during the project inception phase, and the expected results and the indicators could then be adjusted and finalised before the implementation starts. Likewise as regards the subsequent assessment of what has been achieved. We would oblige the beneficiaries to engage in this, as an integral part of the project.
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It is clear from the evaluations we have had done that the CoE should improve our project design skills. That also comes out from the evaluation made of the cooperation between the CoE and the EU from 2000 to 2010. Quite often our indicators are fairly meaningless, and the expected results are either too wide or they are just a list of activities. This should be a priority for the CoE because otherwise these weaknesses risk overshadowing the good work that is often being done.

However, I would also say that getting to a point where we can show evidence-based results is not something the CoE can do on its own. We have to convey the message to our beneficiaries and donors that the responsibility for the effectiveness of for example capacity-building is shared with the beneficiaries, be it by providing reliable data or taking steps to ensure sustainability.

This means that ownership is key. I think we have to be clear and specific about what the CoE can make happen, and what needs to be contributed from the beneficiary side.

Moreover, as regards the JPs, the CoE often has limited flexibility. Our aim is that the findings of the monitoring mechanisms should be the basis for designing the projects. This is a very concrete added value of the CoE. Unfortunately, the project formulation phase is donor-driven and the EU Delegations we negotiate with fix at an early stage – before even approaching the CoE – what they want to see in a project. So because of the way the EU programming cycles are organised, the CoE can often only make small adjustments to programming fiches and not to the expected results.

This is not to play down the general responsibility on the CoE side to be better at fixing results and indicators. But even if the CoE makes available all its expertise and manages the projects in a way that addresses real needs and builds partnerships etc., we cannot create the results – the change – without full beneficiary engagement.

Perhaps if we were to invest more in the ownership part, it could be mutually reinforcing. The stakeholders would actually have a stake in the outcome and they could ultimately also claim credit for the change achieved. But this requires some flexibility on the part of our donors as well.

And finally, to bring this back again to the indicators, if we knew at the design stage that we will have the necessary data at our disposal from the beneficiary, or that the project will include the work necessary to obtain those data, then immediately we would be able to define meaningful, measurable indicators.

Thank you.