“Stories of change for assessing programme impact: Most Significant Change (MSC) technique as a tool for monitoring and evaluation of development programmes”

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Evaluating development programme intervention offers several challenges. The heterogeneity of activities, multiplicity of stakeholders, the diversity of their view and motives, on one hand coupled with multiplicity of perspectives about methods, process and skills involved in their use on the other are concerns that can critically influence perceptions about development effectiveness. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation offers ways of assessing results and learning from results that are more inclusive and in tune with the aspirations of different stakeholders. PM&E make the process of evaluation a people centric activity, building their capacity and skills to evaluate change from their perspective and enables a more inclusive assessment of results and emergence of leanings that are reflective of realities as they actually exist (Mikkelsen, 2007).

The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is an innovative PM&E tool that uses stories of important or significant change to assess the impact of development work as well as monitor the process and outcomes. The technique, also known as monitoring without indicators, is unique because it enables different stakeholders to dialogue and select the change they perceive as most significant and illustrative of the most significant change within a reporting period (Davies & Dart, 2005). Using the technique at the grassroots level offers opportunity for initiating dialogue among the stakeholders that helps to establish social norms and provides valuable insights about the programme from a people’s perspective. Further, the MSC process can simultaneously be a tool for empowering communities by creating mechanisms for dialoguing about diverse ideas, fostering a shared vision as well as building capacities of staff and volunteers make it a tool with a difference.

The use of MSC technique in the context of three diverse programmes implemented by NGOs - Community Radio, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) programme and Viewership of Social issue based TV Serials, has provided valuable insights about the programmes through the stories generated and selected by the people. The technique helped to capture the process and multi-dimensional aspects of change on individuals and communities because of programme interventions. The insights gained complemented quantitative data by providing qualitative insights into the changes and factors affecting them.

The paper highlights the nature of intended and unintended outcomes emerging through the use of MSC technique and how they compare with techniques as well as methodological concerns in the use of MSC technique as a tool for M&E and organizational learning.

References
