

Planning and Evaluation by Canadian Civil Society Organizations: Bridging gaps between methodologies

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I. Synthesis

The Bridging Gaps project came about in 2009 from the observation that Canadian Civil Society Organizations (CSO) were finding the Results-Based Management (RBM) methods and reporting requirements used by many donors to be particularly problematic. Christie's assessment of "The Challenges of Evaluation, as seen by some Canadian CSOs"¹, shows how difficult it is for CSOs to strike a real balance between two goals: on the one hand, doing evaluation to learn from past work and improve strategic plans and aid effectiveness and, on the other hand, evaluating results to account for money and results to contributors and to beneficiaries. As a result, CSOs are actively looking for ways to innovate in the use of planning, monitoring and evaluation as a means to support and reconcile accountable systems with ongoing and meaningful learning processes. The challenge was to learn about and improve the effectiveness of development programming, and satisfy the demands of widely-used accountability frameworks such as RBM.

Eleven organisations originally constituted the Bridging Gap Community of Practice: Canada World Youth (CWY), Crossroads International (CI), CECI/Uniterra, CESO, CUSO-VSO, the North-South Institute, Oxfam-Canada, Oxfam-Québec, SUCO, USC-Canada, and World University Service of Canada (WUSC).

The general objective of the project was to facilitate dialogue and reflection among Canadian Civil Society Organizations and their partners on ways to meet accountability requirements while at the same time exploring and strengthening collaborative, learning-based assessments of contributions to development and social change.

The two specific objectives were to:

1. Develop learning systems within the organizations involved that balance and integrate collaborative planning, evaluation and inquiry; and

¹ *Evaluation of Development Action – Why? of What? for Whom? The Challenges of Evaluation, as seen by some Canadian CSOs*, Jean Christie, for the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, November 2008

2. Document Community of Practice (CoP) innovation in learning systems research so as to facilitate dialogue with broader networks and donors on ways to combine learning with accountability.

The CoP also attempted to address the existing and potential **links between planning, evaluation and the research or inquiry process** implicit in any learning system. Discussion among the various organizations involved in developing the initial proposal pointed to the need to clarify the distinctions and strengthen synergies between three complementary processes: Planning, Evaluation and Inquiry. While various planning, monitoring and evaluation methodologies seek to support learning, the link to inquiry processes is often unclear. Participatory inquiry tools that can inform planning and evaluation activities are typically lacking. Given this reflection Social Analysis Systems (SAS2), a participatory approach to action research, planning and evaluation was chosen as the methodology that would accompany the process. It supports innovative ways of working together in complex multi stakeholder settings, through a blend of evidence- and people-based dialogue and inquiry.

The general spirit of the approach has been to combine RBM with other monitoring and evaluation methodologies towards an “RBM+” approach that meets both the learning and accounting needs of the organizations involved and engages stakeholders in assessing results.

During the first year of the project, the CoP formalized roles and responsibilities, organized five training sessions and facilitated individual coaching for nine organizations. Research results include an assessment of key features of current monitoring and evaluation practices of members, specific evaluations by members, development and testing of a new tool for assessing the contribution of project interventions to observed results (in response to the “Attribution Problem”), and an evaluative process for assessing the results of the CoP.

During the second year of the project, the CoP focused largely on the “attribution problem”, that is, assessing the extent to which change in a domain can be attributed to a specific intervention. This is a central question in evaluation, and a complex issue both theoretically and methodologically. Various CoP members contributed to the further development of the tool ‘Attribution and Contribution’ to address the question. They also contributed to the development and presentation of a discussion paper titled “Assessing the Impact of International Volunteer Co-operation, guiding

questions and Canadian experiences²". At the International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO) held in Ottawa in October 2012. In addition a workshop on the use of the Socratic wheel and another one on the Attribution contribution tool were presented by CWY and CECI/Uniterra during the IVCO conference.

From the second year onward the precarious situation with CIDA meant that most member organizations were involved in planning for various funding contingencies as the call for proposal from the Volunteer Sending Program from CIDA did not come as planned. This made it difficult to dedicate time to new evaluations and take advantage of the coaching offered. As a result, the CoP requested an extension to September 30, 2013 to ensure that the project reaches its goals. During this extension period, the CoP organized three meetings, held a training session on Gender and Evaluation in collaboration with Association Québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) and produced a research report entitled "Innovations with Evaluation Methods: Lessons from a Community of Practice in International Development".

During this period the themes assessment of gender impacts and the assessment of risk or threats to project goals were also addressed. Learning on these issues was supported by a combination of training, discussion, practice, coaching, and research. In addition to the IVCO conference, outreach activities included links to the AQOCI, resulting in the gender and monitoring and evaluation training session held on January, 15-16, 2013 and coordinated by CWY and AQOCI.

As part of the diffusion strategy of the research report, a brown bag lunch took place on November 28, 2013 in order to present the research paper to all CoP members and IDRC staff. This last meeting was also the opportunity to discuss the impact that the CoP had on each member organization.

Project outputs include reports on applications of new tools to evaluation issues of interest to participating organisations, a discussion paper on assessing the impacts of international volunteer cooperation programs developed by SAS2 Dialogue; a presentation of the Socratic Wheel at the annual conference of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO); a joint training session with the CoP "Genre en pratique" – led by AQOCI – to explore the use of participatory methods for gender evaluation and share experiences; the development and dissemination of research report; and coaching and support to evaluation plans of organizations and additional training activities, for members.

² By Daniel Buckles and Jacques Chevalier.

II. Research Problem

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working at the international level are looking for ways to bridge gaps and address problems in their planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. The search is prompted by a desire to learn about and improve the effectiveness of their development programming, and satisfy the demands of widely-used accountability frameworks such as RBM. It is difficult to strike a real balance between two goals integral to the field: on the one hand, learning from past work and improving plans; and, on the other hand, accounting for resources and results both to donors and the ultimate beneficiaries of development. Christie (2008:2), in a study commissioned by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), summarizes the concerns raised by an Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness chaired by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA): the need for management tools to promote iterative learning and adaptation, attention to the measurement of complex goals such as capacity building and gender equity, mutual accountability to beneficiaries as well as donors, and the need for multi-stakeholder approaches to planning and coordination.

The Bridging Gap project responded to these and other gaps by facilitating a dialogue within and among CSOs and their partners on ways to meet accountability requirements efficiently while at the same time exploring and strengthening collaborative, learning-based assessments of contributions to development and social change. The project worked through a Community of Practice (CoP) to:

- Develop learning systems within the organizations involved that balance and integrate collaborative planning, evaluation and inquiry; and
- Document CoP innovation in learning systems research so as to facilitate dialogue with broader networks and donors on ways to combine learning with accountability.

The work of the CoP focused on evaluation and learning strategies that are participatory and adapted to topics that are complex where multiple stakeholders intervene and interact. The general spirit of the approach has been to combine RBM with other monitoring and evaluation methodologies towards an “RBM+” approach that meets both the learning and accounting needs of the organizations.

The government-sponsored Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and CSO responses to the agreement, highlight the challenge, which consists in striking a meaningful balance between two legitimate expectations: honest and useful

learning from ongoing work, and accounting for both resources and results to donors and, importantly, to the intended beneficiaries of development.

The understanding of the research problem has evolved over the life of the project in the context of the learning outcomes. There can be no all-purpose evaluation methodology that addresses various potential situations which may arise. The goals and activities that are to be monitored and evaluated are as varied as the projects and programs themselves. Recommendations to address these issues are found in section 6 of this report.

III. Project Implementation and Management

a. Formation of the CoP

Eleven organizations were represented in the Community of Practice: Canada World Youth (CWY), Crossroads International (CI), CECI/Uniterra, CESO, CUSO-VSO, the North-South Institute, Oxfam-Canada, Oxfam-Québec, SUCO, USC-Canada, and World University Service of Canada (WUSC). The North-South Institute withdrew from the project in year 1 due to a lack of time and its distinct profile compared to the other organizations in the CoP. CWY coordinated the project, including logistics liaising with members and the SAS2 consultants to support training, coaching and research work.

All organizations commit staff and resources to the project, including active participation in CoP training events, the use of new tools in ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities, and documentation of results. These commitments were formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding between Canada World Youth and each other member of the CoP, signed by Senior Managers. Attendance at project events by organizations has been very consistent, with some substitutions due to staff turnover, maternity leave, and shifts in internal responsibilities.

From the beginning a mind-mapping tool (MindManager) and a file sharing site (Dropbox) were set up to support ongoing CoP planning, sharing of files, and the circulation of minutes. This allowed member organizations to be directly involved in setting the agendas and reviewing outputs posted to the CoP file sharing site. A recommended template to document results and lessons from the application of tools was also adapted for use by the members. All member organizations received a copy of “The Social Weaver: A Handbook for Participatory Action Research, Planning, and Evaluation”, used to guide and support training activities. Other resources for monitoring and evaluation were posted to the file sharing site.

b. Project activities

Project activities focused primarily on training, coaching evaluations by members, reflection on project learning and key debates in the field and documenting results of evaluations using new or adapted methodologies. For a detailed Work Plan of what was planned for the project period, see figure 1 below.

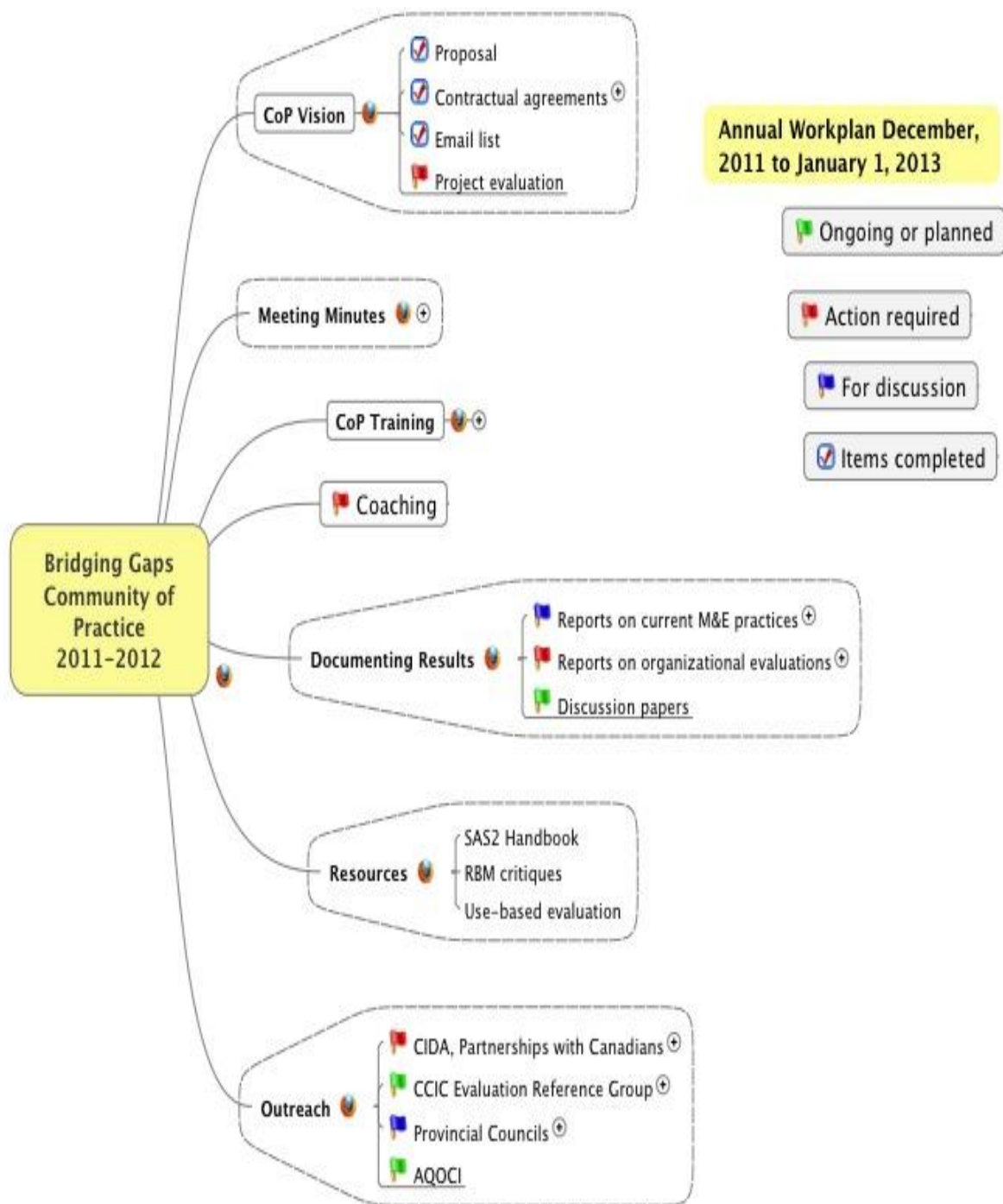


Figure 1: Evaluation CoP annual plan

Training

During the life of the project, the CoP met for eleven training sessions, meetings alternated between Montreal and Ottawa (annexe 1). All sessions were facilitated by two consultants from SAS2 Dialogue, and started with participants sharing their experiences using tools from the previous sessions and trouble-shooting around difficulties encountered. This grounding of practice was followed by the introduction of new tools and practice in small groups using the content and context of the participants. Brainstorming on outstanding or emerging issues around which subsequent training sessions could be organized comprised the final part of each session. The facilitators then selected tools in response to the topics or issues identified from the brainstorming to plan the subsequent session.

Following each training event, participants selected tools to fit topics important to them and their organizations, and applied them in real-life evaluations. These experiences subsequently launched a new round of sharing and trouble-shooting at the beginning of each training event.

The training events covered a range of topics:

- the design of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tool for assessing the work of the CoP;
- assessing current approaches to M&E practices;
- developing a theory of change;
- Sharing diagnostic exercises using the Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation (PIE) tool, theory of changes and attribution/contribution tool the problem of attributing results to specific project interventions;
- monitoring risks;
- the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support evaluation;
- Assessing the attribution of projects to changes in a domain assessing the risks or threats to project goals;
- converting RBM plans and methods such as surveys into participatory group dynamics;
- impact assessment;
- gender, monitoring and evaluation; and
- Introduction of a new participatory tools on planning and evaluation

Sharing sessions and general discussion on problems encountered also contributed to learning on other topics.

Coaching

Coaching sessions were offered to all organizations to help adapt participatory tools to specific issues and evaluations (Annex 2). This was a particular component of this CoP not usually offered in most communities of practices.

Eight organizations in the CoP took advantage of the coaching to adapt participatory tools during the project. The limited uptake of the coaching support was due in large part to the reorientation of institutional priorities from **evaluation to planning** of new projects and programs. This was in preparation of a new cycle of CIDA funding to international volunteer sending organizations. Given that, coaching and support was provided for the writing of the stories that comprised the research report

The coaching sessions focused on evaluations of partnership models (Cuso International), program impacts on young volunteers (CWY), and gender impacts. Coaching took place in part by email and phone calls, but primarily through face-to-face meetings and workshop events.

c. Project Coordination

Canada World Youth coordinated project implementation, including logistical support for the training sessions and liaison between members of the CoP and the consultants for the individualized coaching.

CWY assured coordination of the participation of the CoP at external events like the annual meeting of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO) held in Ottawa in October 2012. The theme was “Volunteering for Development – Innovation and impact in a changing development environment”. CWY coordinated with the conference organizers and the consultants so that the learning of the CoP could be integrated into the IVCO annual meeting. The conference focus on organizational learning and improved practice contributing to the recognition of volunteering for development as a powerful and effective approach to addressing the challenges of international development was an opportunity for the members of the CoP Bridging Gaps to present the work they had been involved in. Two workshops were presented at the IVCO conference; one on the use of the Socratic wheel by CWY and another one on the Attribution/contribution tool by CECI/Uniterra. A paper by Daniel Buckles and Jacques Chevalier titled “Assessing the Impact of International Volunteer Co-operation, guiding questions and Canadian experiences” was distributed to all conference participants. The event provided a key opportunity to share the work of the CoP with a large number of international participants with an interest in participatory evaluation tools.

At the request of the members of the CoP, CWY organized a two day workshop which combines the expertise and participation of the CoP Bridging Gaps and the CoP Gender in practice (coordinated by AQOCI) in January 15-16, 2013. On the theme "Gender and monitoring and evaluation", the workshop explored the application of SAS2 tools in monitoring and evaluation for project related to equality between women and men, or for projects where gender is a cross-cutting theme.

IV. Project Outputs and Dissemination

a. Documenting Results

To consolidate learning and share results, each participating organization was responsible for documenting their own results. Documentation took the form of evaluation designs, reports on the use of tools in specific evaluations, applications of new tools to evaluation issues of interest to participating organizations, assessments of current monitoring and evaluation practices, verbal presentations during meetings, and “stories of change” describing impacts of the CoP learning on organisational practices. Documents resulting from these activities are posted to the project file-sharing site, and are listed in Table 1 as outputs of project.

Table 1: Application of CoP Learning to Evaluation and Inquiry Questions

Title	Organisation	Tools ³
Measuring System Dynamics in CUSO International Programming	CUSO	System Dynamics
Assessing Learning Systems- 1	NSI	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation.
Assessing Learning Systems-2	NSI	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation.
Evaluating Employee Learning and Development at CUSO-VSO	CUSO	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation.
Examining CESO's Learning System	CESO	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation; Sabotage; The Socratic Wheel; Evaluation Purpose Venn
A Learning System for CWY's Global Learners Program	CWY	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation; Stakeholder Identification
Measuring Experiential Learning with SAS2 Socratic Wheels	CWY	The Socratic Wheel
Planification, Evaluation, Recherche: Créer un système apprenant	CECI	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation; The Socratic Wheel
Coopération Volontaire: Réunion CECI-EUMC	CECI-WUSC Uniterra	Attribution and Contribution; Evaluation Purpose Venn; Force Field; Impact and Feasibility; Values, Interest, Positions
Monitoring and Evaluating Organisational Progress: a tool for Program Managers	CWY	The Socratic Wheel; with Progress Markers
Women Feed the World Campaign	OXFAM	Most significant change; Validation

³ A complete description of each tool is available in *The Social Weaver: A Handbook for Participatory Action Research, Planning, and Evaluation*.

Title	Organisation	Tools ³
South-South Exchange Programs in Southern Africa: Contributions and Future Directions	CWY and VOSESA	Petit Bonhomme; Force Field, The Socratic Wheel
Évaluer le système apprenant de SUCO	SUCO	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation; Evaluation Purpose Venn; The Socratic Wheel; Attribution and Contribution
Assessing current learning systems	Inputs from SUCO, CUSO, CESO, NSI, CECI	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation
Gender equality review process 2012-2013	USC-Canada	Venn Diagram; Values, Interests; Position (VIP), Socratic Wheel; Force Field; Free-list and Pile-sort; Story-telling
Uniterra and HIV/AIDS Programming in Burkina Faso: An Impact Assessment	CECI/Uniterra	Attribution and Contribution; Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation
Monitoring and evaluation system review	Crossroads International	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation
Breaking Down Silos: Program Collaboration and Innovation in Monitoring and Evaluation at CESO	CESO	Planning, Inquiry, Evaluation; Venn Diagram

While members of the CoP indicate at CoP sessions' evaluations that they learned through the work of the CoP, and that they see great potential in the RBM+ approach, finding good opportunities to apply the learning and making time to document the results has been a challenge. Use of the approach in real-life evaluations (beyond the training context) has been uneven from organization to organization.

b. Evaluations by CoP members

To share results and lessons, each participating organization was responsible for documenting applications of CoP learning to specific evaluation activities of the organization. Documentation generally took the form of evaluation designs and reports on specific applications. Documentation of evaluations and related learning by members of the CoP was uneven, from organization to organization. This was partly due to a lack of formal commitments from organizations to do evaluations and identifying steps to support formal evaluations and documentation of informal learning relevant to the project. Discussions with CoP members suggests that many of them were involved in the development of proposals to CIDA for funding renewal after 2014 so have not been able to dedicate time to new evaluations or take full

advantage of the coaching offered by the consultants.

However there were substantial evaluations undertaken by members during the project specifically by the Unitererra Program implemented by CECI and WUSC, and by USC.

The Unitererra Program evaluation made use of the tool *Attribution and Contribution* to create a structured process of data collection, interpretation and decision-making regarding the impacts of project and program level interventions on various sectors. The evaluation was extremely ambitious in scope, involving 108 organizations in thirteen countries and sixty-five projects and sectorial plans (combating HIV/AIDS, girls' education, and livelihoods). Overall, participants said that the assessments were very useful. They created space for high-level thinking relevant to future discussions with donors and other partners regarding the strategic contributions of their projects and plans for further improvements. The analysis also challenged their assumptions regarding the availability and value of evidence on observed change, and the theory of change underlying their program models. In Latin America, for example, where human rights based programming tends to dominate Unitererra's interventions, participants recognized that they had little concrete data on the local expressions of changes in abilities to exercise human rights. This prompted plans to gather field data differently and explore new actions other than advocacy for changes in laws.

For USC Canada, case studies and testimonials collected from the field eloquently illustrated the impact of their programs in people's lives, but did not speak to the breadth or extent of these impacts. USC Canada was seeking to enhance the effectiveness and utility of its M&E systems. Concretely, this translated into two areas of engagement linked to the CoP that have contributed to enhancing USC Canada's M&E: (1) the design of a methodology for assessing gender equality strategies in USC Canada programs, and (2) a broader reflection on how to improve the planning, design and implementation of future results-based management systems. The purpose was to begin discussions, reflections and analysis on organizational systems of USC partner organizations, their strengths and challenges for promoting and addressing gender equality within their organization and to begin to develop action plans and set priorities for improving gender equality at the organizational level.

USC Canada is currently working on a synthesis of the key findings and lessons learned across all programs and the evaluation on gender analysis in their overseas programs is still ongoing

c. Discussion Paper and Presentation

The so-called “attribution problem”, that is, assessing the extent to which change in a domain can be attributed to a specific intervention, is a central question in evaluation. It is also a difficult problem to address, both theoretically and methodologically.

To support work by the CoP on this topic, SAS2 Dialogue was commissioned to develop a discussion paper on assessing the impacts of international volunteer cooperation programs and co-facilitate a presentation of the Socratic wheel at the annual conference of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO), which took place in Ottawa October 14 to 17, 2012. Cuso International played a key role in organizing the conference and commissioning the paper, in coordination with CWY. The paper, which drew on learning from the CoP and engaged several members in the presentation, was well received at the conference. Several international organizers said it was the most dynamic and innovative session they had seen at an IVCO conference in many years (the presentation drew over 80 participants).

On the last months of the projects, the CoP focused on the production of a major research paper on the theory, methods and cases of evaluation emerging from the CoP experience and literature. This research report was the major research output for the project.

d. Dissemination/Outreach and web products

Some members of the CoP are also members of other groups working broadly on monitoring and evaluation issues. This includes the Evaluation Reference Group convened by CCIC and a gender evaluation community of practice coordinated by AQOCI. In both these forums the specific activities and plans of the Bridging Gaps community of practice were presented during the project, followed by discussions of areas for cooperation. Discussions with AQOCI led to a joint training session, which took place January 15 and 16, 2013 to explore the use of participatory methods for gender evaluation and share experiences.

CWY coordinate with the CoP consultants the development and implementation of a dissemination plan for the Research Report. The document titled “Innovations with Evaluation Methods: *Lessons from a Community of Practice in International Development*” is published on each organization website and discussion is ongoing with CCIC for diffusion.

V. Development Impacts

While the project did not seek to create development impacts directly, some members of the CoP applied their learning to new work with partners in developing countries. Members have provided the following examples:

- Canada World Youth, for example, was the first CSO to use SAS² methods extensively in impact evaluation processes, contributing to a major reinforcement of the organization towards a community-based approach to their mandate and a reorientation towards an increased participation of youth in the life of their community. So too, Canada World Youth provided partners in Honduras, Bolivia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya and Tanzania with tools adapted from the CoP (Socratic wheel) to enable them to independently assess impacts in their respective organization and in their communities during field visits. Evidence suggests that this helps strengthen youth and partners' roles as actors of development, as opposed to be limited to a role of beneficiaries.
- An evaluation of Volunteer programs in southern Africa, based on a SAS² Dialogue design and implemented by CWY and VOSESA, has already had an impact on the capacities of organisations based in South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania. They are building a regional network and increasing their collaboration as a way to ensure sustainability of their initiatives. The evaluation also shed some light with regards to needed improvements in the south-south youth exchange model they implement.
- An application of Activity Dynamics in Mozambique by a CUSO member of the CoP (Owens, 2011) is providing a strategic input into planning adjustments to CUSO's support for national programming.

VI. Lessons learned and Recommendations

Evaluation activities took place in an ongoing basis during the project; at each training session, and during the last meeting of the CoP where members were asked to rank the components of the CoP that proved to be the most useful in their work. In addition, as part of the research for the research report the tool *Attribution and Contribution* developed through the CoP experience was used to structure an evaluation of the impacts of the CoP on members. The lessons learned and recommendations which follow result from these exercises.

First, there can be no all-purpose evaluation methodology that addresses all possible situations where efforts to account for resources and assess adaptive learning are needed. This understanding of the research problem evolved over the life of the project in light of learning outcomes. The goals and activities to monitor and evaluate are as varied as the projects and programs in which they are inserted. The design of M&E activities needs to match the purpose, the level of complexity and the constraints (time, resources, skills, baseline conditions) found in each situation. To do so, it must be flexible, meaning that it:

- can **mix** tools and **adapt** them to **match** the situation;
- mesh and integrate both **qualitative** and **quantitative** thinking and findings;
- is **practical** and **time-efficient** (avoiding exhaustive data and text-heavy reports);
- can be **scaled up or down**, to meet needs and existing constraints (financial and human resources); and
- can generate both project and **higher level findings**.

Second, further innovation is needed to ensure that M&E

- supports an **ongoing feedback**, action-reaction loop (as in medical practice), to acknowledge learning from failure and constantly address the “So what?” and the “Now what?” questions;
- factors in the effects of uncertainty and **complexity**, including **multiple stakeholder contributions** to observed results;
- encourages interactive engagement and mutual learning and accountability among stakeholders. This principle is often ignored in self-evaluations (isolated from challenges by others) as well as in evaluations by proxy (assessing one’s work by reporting on the results of one’s partners) or carried out by third party experts (using survey, interview and narrative data).

A key learning in response to both learning and accountability agendas was rather than trying to homogenize and standardize M&E for all possible scenarios through the use of RBM, the experiences of the CoP suggest that hybrid models should be pursued and supported.

Three models emerged from discussions during training and interviews:

- One model, called an RBM+ (plus) approach by Christie (2008), implies **supplementing RBM** with topical evaluations focused on evaluation questions not included in formal logic model frameworks. During the course of the project CoP organizations identified a range of topical evaluations such as capacity building, partnership development, and empowerment objectives that were built into the missions and programming models of organizations but not necessarily spelled out in funding agreements with donors.
- Another model emerging from the work of the CoP centered on **improving RBM** by using participatory methods to collect and analyze the data needed to show expected results in an RBM framework. Using structured, group-based conversation and other participatory tools to refine expected results instead of surveys and questionnaires preserves the sharp focus of RBM while at the same time facilitating interactive engagement and mutual learning. The use of new information and computer technology such as cell phones, the web and radio to facilitate the collection and virtual discussion of results was another methodological improvement explored during one of the CoP sessions.
- The third model, innovated by the CoP, can be called a transformative approach to M&E focused on **integrating RBM** into a learning systems approach. New thinking by members of the CoP about balancing and integrating planning, inquiry and evaluation activities of their organization helped to situate M&E frameworks in this broader perspective. In this model, RBM is intentionally scaled down to its minimalist form – a few key results and associated indicators – fully integrated into the broader organizational process of learning from system change and changing systems of learning.

Third lesson learned was that attention should be given to applying the learning to date to real-life evaluations in each organization, and further capacity building to engage a broader base of practitioners within the organizations. Opportunities have been created through the CoP for CSOs to learn from one another about planning,

monitoring and evaluation approaches and to explore together how to efficiently and effectively combine RBM with alternative approaches that emphasize collaborative learning and adaptation in complex situations.

While members of the CoP indicate at CoP sessions' evaluations that they learned through the work of the CoP, and that they see great potential in the RBM+ approach, finding good opportunities to apply the learning and making time to document the results has been a challenge. Use of the approach in real-life evaluations (beyond the training context) has been uneven from organization to organization.

This was illustrated during the last meeting of the CoP when members were asked to select the top two components of the CoP that proved to be the most useful in their work from the five components; meetings, coaching, practice, publications, research and development. The results are presented in figure 3. Practice was the component judged the most useful to their work (50%) as it allowed them to share and test the tools within their organizations and insert M&E in a learning cycle. Coaching was in second place (25%); members felt this component introduced new ideas and more advanced design. Coaching sessions were offered to all organizations to help adapt participatory tools to specific issues and evaluations (Annex 2). This was a particular component of this CoP not usually offered in most communities of practices.

For some members (13%) meetings were important because it inspired all the other components. Research and development on new tools and methodologies was chosen by 13%. Though publication was not chosen by any members, the members felt that all components fed into presentations and publications (Discussion Paper at IVCO and research report) and that publications by other organizations and the SAS2 handbook were useful.

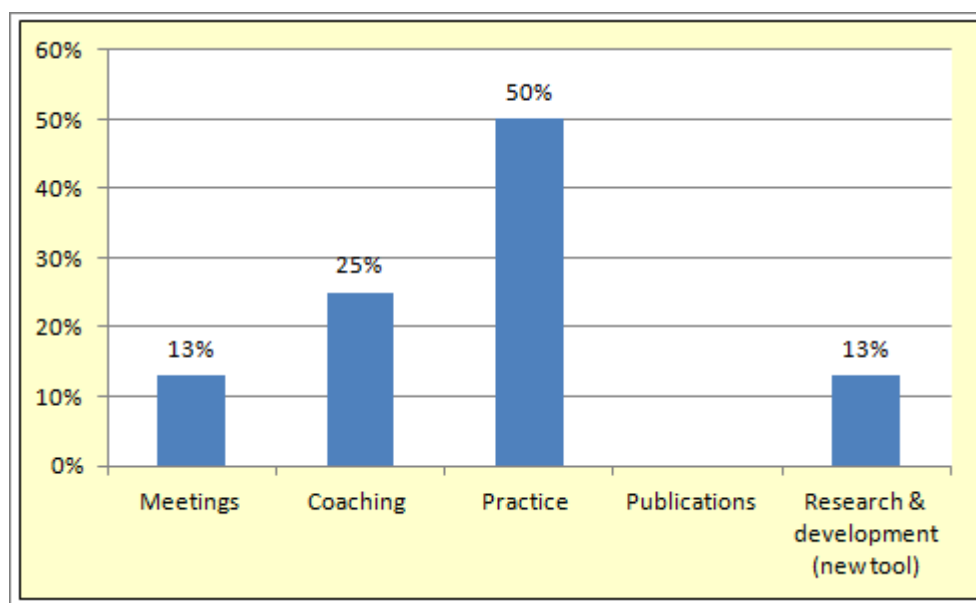


Figure 3: Evaluation of the CoP at the end of the project

The tool *Attribution and Contribution* developed through the CoP experience was used to structure the evaluation of the impacts of the CoP. Using a structured interview approach, Daniel Buckles talked with individuals or small groups in seven member organizations⁴ active in the CoP at the end of the project. A more detailed description of the process and results is available in the research report.

The interviews and the application of the *Attribution and Contribution* tool were framed around the shared objectives of the CoP, which can be distinguished at three levels. As an immediate result, members expected to **learn** new approaches to M&E and **share** this learning both within their organization and with partners. At the intermediate level, members expected to **use or apply** their learning to real-life planning, monitoring and evaluation activities, internally and with partners. At the ultimate result level they expected to see the **integration** of new approaches to M&E in their organizations and in the organizations of some partners, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of their programming.

The *Attribution and Contribution* interviews focused on evidence of observed changes in M&E at each result level, the efficiency of the intervention and final judgments regarding the overall value or worth of the intervention. In each interview participants described concrete examples of learning, use and integration of new approaches to M&E observed in the organization during the life of the

⁴ CECI/UNITERRA, CWY, SUCCO, USC-CANADA, CUSO International, Crossroads International and CESO

project. They then formed a judgment regarding the significance of the observed changes, labeling it from a situation of major or moderate progress to small or no progress or whether the situation had actually gotten worse. Participants then explored what part of the observed changes would have happened anyway, without the CoP intervention. This included discussion of other factors and actors intervening in the domain and reasoned distinctions between the activities and impacts of all factors and actors.

The findings from the interviews point to three different conclusions by member organizations. Half of the organizations interviewed (3) determined that their engagement with the community of practice was **very worthwhile**, two concluded it was **worthwhile** and one noted that the results of their engagement in the community of practice were **less than they were aiming for**. Each organization arrived at its conclusion for different reasons reflected in the relationships between the results of the CoP intervention at different levels and the means and conditions encountered.

At the immediate result level – **learning** new approaches to M&E and **share** this learning both within their organization and with partners – the changes noted included increase knowledge of participatory tools, sharing across organizations, and understanding of key evaluation concepts.

At the intermediate result level - to use or apply their learning to real-life planning, monitoring and evaluation activities - gaps in skill development was recognized as an ongoing barrier to the effective use of tools for evaluation. Discussions around training recommendations also drew attention to the value of engaging non-specialists within organizations in the M&E process; some argued this was needed to mobilize evidence for specific evaluations and also to expand and deepen the use of evaluation findings and establish a common culture of M&E across organizations. These observations suggest a multi-tiered approach to training in M&E, based on the different needs and functions of actors within organizations.

Finally, at the ultimate result level - integrating new approaches to M&E at an organizational level – several challenges were identified including constraints in financial and human resources, range of skills to be effective and difficulty in maintaining engagement in learning when accountability to donors predominate. Recommendation around strategies for dealing with these challenges were also made; including proper allocation of resources for partners' engagement in M&E, and adapting M&E systems to make it easier to generate the information needed,

with the right people. The experience of the CoP shows that M&E can be more efficiently designed and consequently more cost effective.

In conclusion, while the impact of the CoP varied for specific members, and the external factors and internal conditions were not always favorable to achieving results at the intermediate and ultimate result levels, commitment to continuing with key innovations was a constant during both the training sessions and the interviews. For some members continuing to innovate in the directions fostered by the CoP experience was necessary to show relevance in a competitive environment and make better use of the information already being collected but not fully understood or shared while for other the integrity of their organizational mission depended on the further development and use of participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation – aimed at being accountable to intended beneficiaries and engaging them in mutual learning.

List of acronyms

AQOCI	Association Québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale
CCIC	Canadian Council for International Cooperation
CECI	Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
CESO	Canadian Executive Service Organization
CI	Crossroads International,
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CoP	Community of Practice
CSO	Canadian Civil Society Organizations
CWY	Canada World Youth
IVCO	International Volunteer Co-operation Organizations
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NSI	North South Institute
RBM	Results-Based Management
SAS2	Social Analysis Systems
SUCO	Solidarité, Union, Coopération
VOSESA	Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa
WUSC	World University Service of Canada

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Figure 1: Community of Practice Work Plan and minutes, as of November 3, 2011.

Figure 2: Evaluation CoP annual plan

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Table 1: Application of CoP Learning to Evaluation and Inquiry Questions

References

Evaluation of Development Action – Why? of What? for Whom? The Challenges of Evaluation, as seen by some Canadian CSOs, Jean Christie, for the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, November 2008

Annexes

Annex 1 Training sessions

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Workshop Date	Location	# of participants
January 20-21, 2011	Georges-Vanier Library in Montreal (CWY)	15 + 2 facilitators
March 31, 2011	CUSO-VSO office in Ottawa	14 + 2 facilitators
May 25, 2011	CECI office in Montreal	16 + 2 facilitators
September 22, 2011	WUSC office in Ottawa	16 + 2 facilitators
November 3, 2011	Oxfam Québec office in Montreal	15 + 2 facilitators
January 13, 2012	Oxfam Canada, Ottawa	14 + 2 facilitators
March 12, 2012	SUCO, Montreal	16 + 2 facilitators
May 11, 2012	CUSO International, Ottawa	13 + 2 facilitators
September 17, 2012	Crossroads International, Montreal	8 + 2 facilitators
January 15-16 th , 2013	Georges-Vanier Library in Montreal (CWY)	Day 1: 21+2 facilitators Day 2: 25+2 facilitators
April 19 th , 2013	USC-CANADA office in Ottawa	12 + 2 facilitators
November 28 th , 2013	IDRC office in Ottawa	17 + 2 facilitators Presentation to IDRC: 32

Annex 2 Coaching sessions

COMMUNITY of PRACTICE COACHING SESSIONS

Period	Organization	Topic
December 8, 2011	Cuso International	Evaluating the CUSO-VSO partnership model
April 20-26, 2012	CWY	Co-design of an evaluation framework for engaging participants in the Global Learner program in the assessment of program impacts
July 18-25, and August 13-14, 2012	USC-CANADA	Co-design and training to assess equity practices within field programming and with partner organizations
December 12-14, 2012	USC-CANADA	workshop for training of facilitators and validation of the Gender Equality Review methodology
January 6 –13, 2012	OXFAM Canada	Training planning, preparation and facilitation
May 28-29, 2013	Cuso International	M&E workshop design
May 30-31, 2013	SUCO	Peru and Haiti M&E design
Between July 2 and August 12, 2013	CESO	Developing a baseline study format for CPB8 Designing a Lead VA evaluation tool
July 2 - August 12, 2013	CESO, CWY, SUCO, USC-CANADA, CECI/Uniterra	Coaching for stories telling
July 2 - August 12, 2013	Crossroads International, CESO, CWY, SUCO, USC-CANADA, CECI/Uniterra	Attribution interviews
September 24, 2013	USC-CANADA	Reflection with USC staff on possible strategies to improve M&E system for next program cycle

Annex 3 Discussion paper: “Assessing the Impact of International Volunteer Co-operation, guiding questions and Canadian experiences”

Annex 4 Research report: “Innovations with Evaluation Methods: *Lessons from a Community of Practice in International Development*”