

Monitoring of Advocacy – how to - when the change process is complex?

An explorative process in *Fagligt Fokus* 2014

Many NGOs are struggling with measuring advocacy, and many of the same challenges are raised again and again: documenting attribution, setting indicators, logic of plans and campaigns, collecting evidence, reporting on outcomes, organisational learning, multi-country M&E systems, donor expectations, and accessing political intelligence - just to mention some of the identified challenges¹.

Monitoring approaches to advocacy have often not been in support of the advocacy results. This is in particular the case when stakeholders are not involved, as the process will risk disempowering the very groups on whose behalf advocacy was carried out. At the same time donor expectations in regard to NGOs being able to document advocacy results are increasing, which in a Danish context is emphasized by the RAM procedures (resource allocation for framework organisations):

Advocacy efforts should be monitored for quality, accountability, results and learning, and should be useful for guiding efforts of capacity development. Monitoring advocacy is often based on self-assessment and monitoring processes, rather than focusing exclusively on the end results.

Draft "Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society" (Feb. 2014)

However, advocacy work often takes place in contexts of complexity characterized by a continuously evolving environment, which explains why there has been limited success in approaching monitoring advocacy by use of fixed plans, predetermined outcomes and indicators and a linear chain of cause-and-effect. Monitoring advocacy is consequently by some described as "**more of an art than a science**".

Purpose

These challenges call for probing into possible new approaches to monitoring of advocacy – instead of doing "more of the same". On this basis *Fagligt Fokus* is in 2014 initiating a process, which aims to explore **how and to what extent it is possible to combine a results-based approach to monitoring of advocacy (e.g. RAM) with an approach, which includes the complexity of advocacy change processes.**

By a **complexity aware approach** we understand an approach, which takes into account complexity in relation to monitoring due to a growing recognition that many advocacy interventions are promoting change processes that are not easily managed

¹ Issues are raised in a recent INTRAC paper: "Challenges and solutions in monitoring and evaluating advocacy", by Sarah Rose, Feb. 2014, in the *Fagligt Fokus* paper "Challenges and Dilemmas in Monitoring Advocacy", by Annemette Danielsen and Dorte Skovgaard, Feb. 2014, and by the participants in the *Fagligt Fokus* seminar 13th March 2014.

by conventional monitoring approaches and tools, which follow a logic of linearity, predictability, and control.

The process in *Fagligt Fokus* aims to: develop our approaches to monitoring of advocacy processes, by jointly engaging in exploring a complexity aware approach to monitoring advocacy.

Process

By a *complexity aware approach* we understand an approach, which takes into account complexity in relation to monitoring due to a growing recognition that many advocacy interventions are promoting change processes that are not easily managed by conventional monitoring approaches and tools

In this process we will draw inspiration from existing work on **developmental evaluation**:

Traditional evaluation	Developmental evaluation
Purpose: Supports improvement, summative tests and accountability	Purpose: Supports development of innovation and adaptation in dynamic environments
Roles & relationships: Positioned as an outsider to assure independence and objectivity	Roles & relationships: Positioned as an internal team function integrated into the process of gathering and interpreting data, framing issues, surfacing and testing model developments
Accountability: Focused on external authorities and funders based on explicit and pre-ordinate criteria	Accountability: Centered on the innovators' values and commitment to make a difference
Options: Rigorously options-focused, traditional research and disciplinary standards of quality dominate	Options: Utilization focused: options are chosen in service to developmental use
Measurement: Measure performance and success against pre-determined goals and SMART outcomes	Measurement: Develops measures and tracking mechanisms quickly as outcomes emerge; measures can change during the evaluation as the process unfolds
Evaluation results: Detailed formal reports; validated best practices, generalizable across time and space. Can engender fear of failure	Evaluation results: Rapid, real time feedback; diverse, user-friendly forms of feedback. Evaluation aims to nurture learning
Complexity & uncertainty: Evaluator tries to control design implementation and the evaluation process	Complexity & uncertainty: Learning to respond to lack of control; staying in touch with what's unfolding and responding accordingly
Standards: Methodological competence and commitment to rigor, independence; credibility with external authorities and funders; analytical and critical thinking	Standards: Methodological flexibility eclecticism, and adaptability; systems thinking; creative and critical thinking balanced; high tolerance for ambiguity; open and agile; teamwork and people skills; able to facilitate rigorous evidence-based perspectives

Source: betterevaluation.org

Taking into account the nature of complex change when dealing with advocacy monitoring - **the following questions will be inspiring the exploration process:**

1. How can a complexity aware approach to monitoring of advocacy contribute to clarifying **relationships**, roles and expectations of the actors involved in the intervention?
2. How can a complexity aware approach to monitoring of advocacy contribute to strengthening the internal **adaptive capacity** of the programme, partner organisations, partner networks, and/or Northern NGOs?
3. How can a complexity aware approach to monitoring of advocacy contribute to satisfying downward, horizontal and upward **accountability needs**?
4. How can a complexity aware approach to monitoring of advocacy contribute to **learning** about the progress towards the advocacy objectives (of the programme, partner organisations, partner networks, Northern NGOs)?

The phased process will be framed by the diagram below, which will help us to explore how our advocacy monitoring practices can be adjusted and developed:

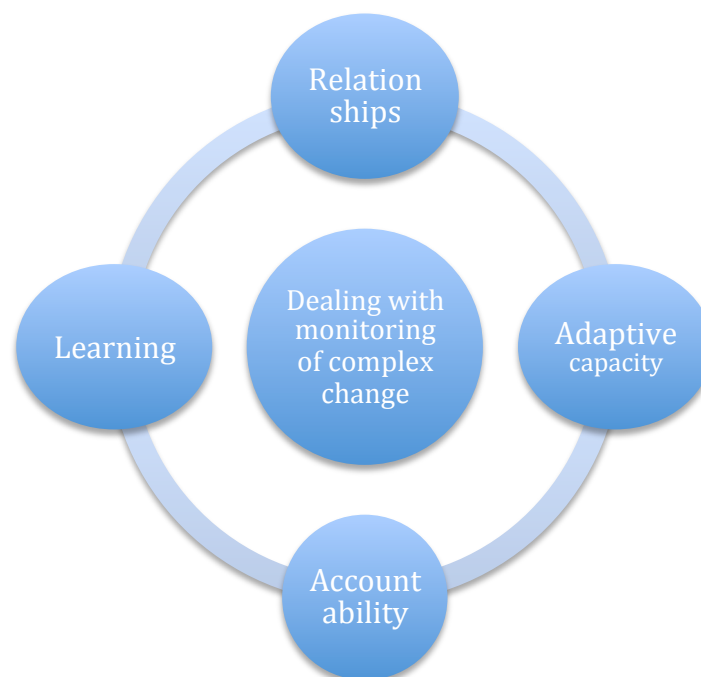


Diagram 1 on complexity aware monitoring (adjusted from *Dealing with complexity through actor-focused Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (PME)*, PSO November 2012).

Participation and ways of working:

The target group for the phased process is: NGO representatives from framework, program or small and middle-sized organizations working with programme development, quality assurance, and monitoring, learning and evaluation.

Participation in the exploration process can take place in the following way:

Professional Panel participation: A Professional Panel consisting of 4-6 representatives from target group organisations is to be established. The role of the Professional Panel is to inspire and guide the overall process, drawing on existing experience in regard to monitoring of advocacy. Professional Panel members might also share own working experiences during the workshops, e.g. by inviting a partner to take part.

The Professional Panel will meet 3-4 times during the process:

- Identify and probe into questions and issues to be addressed in the process.
- Contribute to the planning of the workshops and make own experiences available for further exploration in the process.
- Serve as professional sparring partners and 'critical readers' of the draft framework for complexity aware monitoring of advocacy.

In order to join the Professional Panel it is a requirement that you have hands-on experience from working with monitoring of advocacy, including preferably advocacy monitoring in a complex environment. We have already received confirmation of participation from some NGO representatives, but if you are interested in joining the Professional Panel, please contact Nina Lauritzen (nl@cisu.dk) for possible participation.

Workshop participation: Participants can take part in all 3 workshops or in selected workshops. All workshops will combine input, interaction in the form of facilitated peer group processes, and self-reflection. The intention is in essence to establish a space, which is developmental and conducive to learning.

We will jointly explore possible new approaches by use of visual inputs, pod casts, presentations etc. and an external input (James Taylor, CDRA²). Participants will be invited to do homework in the form of small exercises to be undertaken in their own organisations, and they will be encouraged to share experiences during the following module.

As we all will be testing new grounds, the quality of the results from the process will depend on the active engagement of the participants and the interaction in the group, and between the participants and the facilitators. In this way the process itself will test and potentially model the idea of applying a complexity aware approach to working and interacting.

Participants should be prepared to engage in a process where there are no fixed solutions and where curiosity and an open attitude drive the work.

² James Taylor has for many years been the director of CDRA in South Africa – due changes in CDRA's funding situation he is now working as a CDRA associate. Some of his writings can be viewed at www.cdra.org.za

Timeframe and dates:

The phased approach to monitoring advocacy processes is planned to take place between April and December 2014 and will consist of 3 workshops plus possibly coaching sessions. The first meeting in the Professional Panel is planned to take place **14th May**.

Plan and content of workshops on working with a complexity aware approach to advocacy:

Workshop 1 Date: 14. June 2014	What might a complexity aware approach to monitoring advocacy look like? Visual input aimed at exploring ideas for a complexity aware approach to monitoring, in particular with focus on dealing with multiple actors, perspectives and relationships .
Workshop 2 Date: 28. August 2014	The future fit of advocacy and social change – how can we understand the organising processes differently? Tentative formulation The workshop will focus on context complexity and how to strengthen our adaptive capacity due to changing contexts. With James Taylor, CDRA, South Africa
Workshop 3 Date: October 2014	Feed-back and blind spots when dealing with learning and accountability The workshop will focus on how to deal with different accountability needs and how to foster learning .
Nov-Dec 2014.	Documentation of process and framework:

Outputs/documentation:

Documentation will take place of both the model/approach and the process:

- Development of a model for/approach to a complexity aware approach to monitoring of advocacy processes, incl. supporting tools. Documentation in the form of a guidance note.
- Documentation of the exploration process itself

A model for a complexity aware approach to monitoring advocacy processes, inspired by diagram 1, will be drafted with the aim to both frame the process and to inspire the future advocacy work of the involved NGOs. The model will be probed into and adjusted in the process. In this process we will draw on papers and presentations developed as part of *Fagligt Fokus* activities.

Process facilitation and Fagligt Fokus support:

Process facilitation and documentation will be carried out by Marianne Bo Paludan, with support from Fagligt Fokus/CISU – Jeef Bech and Nina Lauritsen.

Coordination and interaction with the process on Theory of Change will be sought

whenever relevant. Further information about the process and workshop content can be obtained at (<http://fagligtfokus.ngoforum.dk/>).