



DECENTRALISATION &
LOCAL GOVERNANCE

BUILDING COUNTRY MONITORING
AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS
TO SUPPORT DECENTRALISATION REFORMS
Current state and future directions



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For more than 30 years, developing countries have embarked on decentralisation. Their reform paths often suffer from a dearth of evidence-based knowledge of the progress and bottlenecks of reform, whether decentralisation is proceeding and anticipated changes in local institutions, structures and resource flows are taking place as planned. Today, many development partners (DPs) are supporting partner countries in their efforts to build their own Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems and the corresponding statistical and other capacities. Guidance on country M&E systems has also proliferated. However, the current state of developing countries' efforts to build systems for monitoring and evaluation of their decentralisation reforms is relatively little known. This working paper takes stock of the current state of countries' activities and development partners' support in the area of country systems for monitoring and evaluating decentralisation reform and discusses possible implications for further efforts.

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List of Abbreviations

CD	Capacity development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DeLoG	Development Partners Network on Decentralisation & Local Governance
DP	Development partner
ICT	Information and communication technology
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MfDR	Managing for Development Results
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Paris Declaration
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Acknowledgements

This working paper is the result of a series of activities that the Development Partners Network on Decentralisation & Local Governance (DeLoG) has undertaken in the area of country systems for monitoring and evaluating decentralisation reforms. It shows – as far as we see, for the first time – the current state of countries' activities and development partners' support in this particular field and discusses possible implications for further efforts.

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Bonn, December 2015



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Executive Summary

For more than 30 years, developing countries have embarked on decentralisation. Their reform paths often suffer from a dearth of evidence-based knowledge of the progress and bottlenecks of reform, whether decentralisation is proceeding and anticipated changes in local institutions, structures and resource flows are taking place as planned. Even less clear is the de facto effectiveness of decentralisation in attaining specified goals, its impact on key political, social and economic development objectives as well as the relationship between decentralisation and macro-level phenomena such as poverty reduction and security.

The required monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is first and foremost the task of the decentralising countries themselves. Country M&E systems are not a new phenomenon. From the late 1990s onwards, it was generally agreed that developing countries should have their own M&E systems and that this could lead to better evidence, policies and development results. Today, many development partners (DPs) are supporting partner countries in their efforts to build their own M&E systems and the corresponding statistical and other capacities. Guidance on country M&E systems has also proliferated. However, the current state of developing countries' efforts to build systems for monitoring and evaluation of their decentralisation reforms is relatively little known.

Particular challenges for M&E of decentralisation

Monitoring and evaluating development processes countrywide is a complex task. A multitude of actors must be coordinated and willing to cooperate. M&E systems confined to certain sectors and overarching systems need to be matched. Already existing pieces of M&E need to be integrated and built on wherever useful. There is often only limited ownership, leadership and demand for M&E on the part of partner country governments. Accountability is seldom part of the culture of organisations, and the evaluation culture is oftentimes weak, including misconceptions about the purpose of M&E and weak formal accountability systems.

In decentralising countries, the establishment of functioning country M&E systems is faced with all these challenges, plus a few more. This is due to the complexity of decentralisation. It is a multi-dimensional and multi-level reform with (in case of success) profound sectoral repercussions, and it is fraught with considerable political sensitivities and tensions. M&E in decentralisation and its support by DPs become inescapably entangled with this political dynamic.

Steps and stages in building and operating country M&E systems

The process of building a country M&E system and the process of operating it are both

interrelated and partly overlapping. Therefore, the idea of an M&E system being first of all comprehensively designed at the drawing board and only then fully operated is obviously mistaken. Building M&E systems never starts from scratch; there are always already certain elements to build on.

Processes of building and operating country M&E systems have four dimensions. An M&E system needs, first of all, a wide range of conceptual and normative underpinnings, reference points and plans. The related activities to be conducted are mainly thinking and negotiating, and the results manifest themselves first and foremost on paper. The second dimension is operational, i.e. the M&E system and its parts operating. The third dimension concerns the resourcing. It includes human and financial resources and decides to a large extent how much of the conceptual is put into practice or, in other words, how much of it remains on paper. Finally, none of the aforementioned processes, and in particular not the adequate resourcing of the M&E effort, will proceed as required as long as there is no sufficiently strong and consistent political commitment and support. Organising and securing this support is also a process dimension of the M&E effort, although one that is often neglected.

Findings from the implementation of Paris, Accra und Busan commitments

Building and sustaining partner country M&E systems for decentralisation is in im-

portant ways linked to key global development frameworks and commitments of the past ten years. Thanks to the fact that “managing for results” and “country systems” as well as the use of these systems were included in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the ensuing documents agreed in Accra and Busan, with concrete partner country and DP commitments and indicators, there are some interesting insights on the progress made in these areas from surveys and evaluations. The overall picture emerging from these sources shows only slow progress and modest accomplishments in establishing, implementing and using country M&E systems. This slowness of progress is all the more disappointing as a coordinated effort was made over a fairly long period of time in which developing, strengthening and using such systems was an integral component of the dominant international aid effectiveness paradigm, with explicit commitments made by developing countries and development partners alike, institutional structures for follow-up, institutionalised monitoring with indicators of progress and dedicated multi-donor capacity-development (CD) programmes.

Prospects for M&E of decentralisation in the context of the SDGs

In September 2015, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a renewed set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local governments

will have a critical role in achieving the SDGs, due to the fact that many expenditures and investments in sustainable development are being devolved to the subnational level and most pro-poor public services are delivered there. This means, at least implicitly, that it will also be important to measure progress locally, on the basis of disaggregated data that is impossible to collect exclusively through surveys conducted at the national level. However, given the limited resources that are available so far in many countries for such large-scale statistical tasks at subnational levels, a concerted effort will be needed over the next years to develop and strengthen the necessary institutional and human capacities and provide the required financial means.

M&E systems for decentralisation reforms could benefit from such global endeavour, especially with regard to the mobilisation of resources. Agendas for M&E of the SDGs and M&E of decentralisation are not fully congruent, but they share important interests, in particular a high demand for disaggregated data and CD at the local level. But a concerted SDG-related M&E effort of the international community would also pose risks to nascent country M&E systems: risks of creating parallel data collection mechanisms, of stretching already limited human and financial resources and of undermining partner countries' national statistical systems and the attempts at strengthening the local level therein.

Findings from recent DeLoG activities

Based on an analysis of six broad M&E dimensions (policy; indicators and data; institutionalisation and coordination; capacity and funding; involvement of non-governmental actors; use of M&E products), the present situation of country M&E systems for decentralisation can be summarised as a mixture of considerable efforts and some achievements on the one hand and striking deficiencies on the other. In every analysed decentralising country, M&E is of concern, in some form or other. Apart from the officially stated and documented intention to create such an M&E system, there are exploratory studies, piecemeal M&E elements that could be integrated in a future system, "pockets" of M&E expertise, beginnings of networks, now and then an M&E unit in a national ministry or an M&E "cell" at sub-national levels. All countries seem to be somehow on the way, albeit at different stages and with different degrees of momentum and progress.

What is striking, however, is how many efforts are still confined to the level of plans and concepts. There is much more on paper than in operation. In addition, there is an enormous imbalance in practical action: there are quite a number of activities in data collection and processing, but comparatively few presentable products and even fewer examples of use of M&E findings. Moving from concept to implementation, and then beyond engagement in data-related activities pos-

es considerable challenges. A full-fledged country M&E system for decentralisation is nowhere operational. None of the surveyed countries is equipped with a working system that comes close to the models usually depicted in handbooks and guidance papers.

Future directions

The need for further improvement in assessing the results, outcomes and impacts of decentralisation, including the related support, is unabated. However, the discrepancy between efforts undertaken and progress made suggests that “more of the same” is unlikely to deliver better results. Therefore it is time for a new departure for developing and operating M&E systems in decentralisation and the related DP support along two main considerations: First, requirements and expectations vis-a-vis these systems need to be more realistic and scaled down to a level of ambition that is “good enough” so that M&E is brought closer to country realities. Second, a stronger focus on the political economy of M&E in decentralisation is needed.

Just as decentralisation reforms are complex, so, too, are the M&E systems ideally needed to support them. However, the key question is how adequate country M&E systems in decentralisation can be established and implemented in developing countries without falling into the traps of over-ambition and over-engineering.

Similar to a debate on “good enough governance” launched ten years ago, it is time to start questioning the length and complexity of the “national M&E systems” agenda. Not all M&E deficits in a country need to be (or can be) tackled at once, and institution-building and capacity development are products of time. “Good enough country M&E systems in decentralisation” directs attention to considerations of minimum requirements that are necessary to allow more progress in this area to occur.

Where efforts at establishing country M&E systems in decentralisation are under way, technical, capacity and resourcing challenges are joined by a political dimension that is not only difficult to address in itself, but also often the cause of these other deficiencies. However, in the discussion and practice of country M&E systems in decentralisation, too little consideration is given to identifying the political and institutional incentives that drive politicians, bureaucrats and other actors to support or oppose M&E efforts. Understanding opportunities and limitations of M&E in decentralisation and the implications for the support of DPs requires that these motivations as well as divergent interests of key actors are systematically addressed and taken into account.

1. Introduction

For more than 30 years, developing countries have embarked on decentralisation in a wide variety of circumstances and for diverse reasons. As can be easily recognised on the surface, these reforms evolve differently. However, countries' decentralisation reform paths often suffer from a dearth of critical reflection and adaptive capacity due to little evidence-based knowledge: of the progress of reform, whether decentralisation is proceeding as planned, whether anticipated changes in local institutions, structures and resource flows are taking place, and what works and what does not. Even less clear is the de facto effectiveness of decentralisation in attaining specified goals, its impact on key political, social and economic development objectives such as more equitable distribution of services, enhanced government responsiveness, as well as the relationship between decentralisation and macro-level phenomena such as poverty reduction and security. Against this backdrop, there is a risk that – without expanding this knowledge – important parts of the development potential of decentralisation remain untapped and international development partners (DPs) supporting decentralisation so far turn to other fields where success is more evident.

The required monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is first and foremost the task of the decentralising countries themselves. Establishing, strengthening and using the needed “country systems” has been an integral component of the aid and development effectiveness discourse of the

past ten years. Meanwhile, many DPs are supporting developing countries in their efforts to build their own M&E systems and the corresponding statistical and other capacities. Guidance on country M&E systems has also proliferated.

However, the current state of developing countries' efforts to build systems for monitoring and evaluation of their decentralisation reforms is relatively little known. It is time to shed more light on this, first of all in the interest of better M&E of decentralisation, but also because the nascent post-2015 development agenda and the new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will further emphasise the importance of the sub-national level and local actors in results monitoring. While SDG monitoring will be far more interested in *whether* goals are being achieved than in *how* this is happening (e.g. through decentralisation arrangements), there is an obvious convergence of interest between M&E of decentralisation and future M&E of the SDGs that could benefit and create further stimulus for the former.

With this working paper, the Development Partners Network on Decentralisation & Local Governance (DeLoG) wants to contribute to a better understanding of the tasks and challenges involved in establishing and using country systems for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of decentralisation. It is the result of a series of DeLoG activities in the field of M&E, with a particular focus on the outcomes

and impacts of DPs' support to decentralisation reforms. Drawing on insights gained from a DeLoG seminar¹ and a related survey², it takes stock of the current situation in the development of country M&E systems in decentralisation, puts the role of international development partners to the test and brings into focus key aspects that are likely to determine further progress in this field. As a conclusion, a new departure for developing and operating country M&E systems in decentralisation and the related support of DPs is outlined. Two recommendations are central: (a) requirements and expectations vis-a-vis these systems need to be more realistic and scaled down to a level of ambition that is "good enough"; (b) the political economy of M&E in decentralisation needs to be taken systematically into account.

In chapter 2, the paper illustrates important characteristics of decentralisation

that often have a bearing on M&E and tend to inhibit substantial progress in this field; in addition, the key process dimensions of developing country M&E systems are briefly introduced. The purpose of chapter 3 is to sketch out the links that exist between partner countries' M&E systems for decentralisation on the one hand and some key aid/development effectiveness issues and commitments as well as the post-2015/SDG debate on the other. Chapter 4 highlights trends and gaps in the construction and use of developing countries' M&E systems for decentralisation according to several broad M&E dimensions. In conclusion, chapter 5 discusses a selection of practical implications and recommendations for DPs for the ways in which country M&E systems for decentralisation should be further advanced.

1 The seminar "National Systems for Monitoring and Evaluation of Decentralisation Reforms in Francophone Africa", under the patronage of the Government of Cameroon (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation) and organised jointly with GIZ programmes "Support to decentralisation and local development in Cameroon" (PADDL) and "Support to the All-Africa Ministerial Conference on Decentralisation and Local Development" (AMCOD), was held on 17-19 June 2014 in Yaoundé. It brought together about 40 participants, mainly officials in charge of M&E from ministries of eight francophone West and Central African countries and M&E experts from DeLoG member organisations. For a detailed account of the seminar, see DeLoG (2014).

2 The survey was conducted in the aftermath of the seminar. In order to obtain a broader basis of data and more comparable information on a limited number of key issues, an electronic questionnaire was sent to bilateral decentralisation programmes of GIZ in 17 countries. It was filled out either by staff of these programmes working with partners on M&E issues or by partners themselves. Thus, it reflected the views of actors intimately implicated in the development of partners' M&E systems. Full replies were received for 15 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, Cameroon, Burundi, Rwanda, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Peru and Bosnia & Herzegovina.

2. Monitoring and evaluating decentralisation

In the context of international development, monitoring and evaluation³ have two main objectives: feedback/learning and accountability (Box 1). Monitoring and evaluating development processes countrywide is a complex task. A multitude of actors must coordinate and cooperate. M&E systems confined to certain sectors and overarching systems need to be developed in sync and matched. Already existing pieces of M&E and traditional reporting systems need to be integrated and built on wherever useful. There is often only limited ownership, leadership and demand for M&E on the part of partner country governments. Accountability is seldom part of the culture of organisations, and the evaluation culture is oftentimes weak, including misconceptions about the purpose of M&E and weak formal accountability systems.

In decentralising countries, the establishment of functioning country M&E systems is faced with all these challenges, plus a few more. This is due to the complexity of decentralisation, being a multi-dimensional and multi-level reform with (in case of success) profound sectoral repercussions

and fraught with political sensitivities and tensions. As a consequence, an ideal-type fully developed country M&E system in a decentralised context would resemble a whole-of-government M&E system and be very different from sectorally confined M&E systems such as in education, health or water and sanitation.

Decentralisation is a *multi-dimensional* reform. The very concept of decentralisation is a generic term for different ways of transferring powers and the “locus of decision making” from central governments to regional, municipal or local governments (deconcentration, delegation, devolution). It is multi-dimensional also in the sense that its motivation and development rationale concern both issues of political governance (nation-building, conflict management, political stability, territorial governance, political participation, local democracy etc.) and socio-economic dimensions (efficiency of service delivery, local economic development, improvement of people’s living conditions). The implementation of decentralisation covers wide-ranging political, administrative and fiscal reforms. For M&E, this implies

3 The OECD-DAC (2002) defines monitoring as “a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an on-going development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds”. By contrast, evaluation is depicted as “the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors.” In other words, “evaluation is a more involved process than monitoring – both in the amount of data required and the sophistication of the analysis employed – since it seeks not only to determine what has occurred but also why and how it occurred” (Hutchinson/LaFond 2004: 54).

Box 1: Functions of monitoring and evaluation

Decision-makers and other stakeholders of developing countries as well as international development partners can use insights and evidence gained through M&E alike. By measuring the success of government policies, programmes and projects, providing information on the performance of individual government ministries and agencies, managers and their staff as well as DPs who support the work of their partners, and reviewing the progress of particular courses of action (a reform in its entirety or certain aspects of it), accomplishments and problems as well as their causes can be identified. This helps create a well-founded knowledge base for further planning, policy development and decision-making, as well as for managing activities at sector, programme and project levels, including service delivery and the management of staff. Indications of shortcomings and stagnation can lead to re-consideration of current approaches and trigger necessary adjustments. Positive findings can be used to confirm the path chosen, justify continued engagement and help mobilize or maintain political support and external assistance. This

is the feedback and learning function of M&E. The other function is to control, enhance transparency and support accountability relationships by revealing the extent to which actors act according to defined responsibilities, roles and performance expectations, including the proper use of financial resources. Strong accountability can provide powerful incentives to improve performance. M&E provides the essential evidence necessary to underpin strong accountability relationships. This applies within developing country governments (e.g. between sector ministries and central ministries, or between ministers, managers and staff), between these and parliament and/or civil society, between developing country governments and DPs ("mutual accountability"), and within donor countries (e.g. accountability of public sector managers and policy-makers to taxpayers). As part of this accountability function, M&E can be a vehicle to magnify the voice of civil society and to put additional pressure on government to achieve higher levels of performance (Mackay 2009: 172).

a wealth of areas of observation, from outputs of projects and programmes to outcomes of particular reform measures and related assistance up to the wider development impact on democratisation, political stability, inter-regional equity, poverty reduction etc.

Decentralisation is a *multi-level* reform. It involves the national, the local and an

intermediate (regional, district etc.) level in between. Shifting, transferring and re-arranging responsibilities, resources and power between these levels and the respective actors and institutions is the gist of decentralisation. Consequently, M&E of decentralisation must as well be multi-level in nature, conducted at these various levels and deal both with the respective processes, actors and institutions at these

levels individually and with their interaction across levels. Integrating these M&E efforts into a country system presents considerable challenges in terms of communication, coordination and resourcing. The task is further complicated by partly diverging M&E interests and needs (and related support needs) of national and local governments.

Decentralisation has, if successful, profound *sectoral* repercussions. Important outcomes of decentralisation must manifest themselves at the sectoral level, in the improvement of service delivery in areas such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation. Therefore, decentralisation and M&E need to interact closely with sectors and their policies, their reforms and their M&E, as well as with programmes and projects that support these sectors. This applies to all sectors where competences and resources are transferred to lower levels of government. Corresponding and complementary reforms in public service and public financial management are further realms to be considered.

Decentralisation is fraught with *political* sensitivities and tensions, even though not necessarily in the public eye. Rather than just being a technocratic reorganisation of the state structure, decentralisation means redistributing political power, responsibilities and resources between social groups and different government and administrative levels. It produces “losers” who have to give up part of their power, and “winners” who gain new or

enhanced opportunities and scope for action. As Tidemand (2010: 20) put it: “The degree of political decentralisation and local government electoral systems can make or break presidents and ruling parties.” In such an environment, making results-based information available to the public and creating transparency on performance and progress may not always be seen as desirable by the actors concerned, since, as Gørgens/Kusek (2009: 42) put it, a functioning M&E system “will at some point produce data that can be embarrassing, politically sensitive, or detrimental to those who exercise power”. M&E in decentralisation and its support by DPs become inescapably entangled with this political dynamic.

2.1 Steps and stages in developing country M&E systems

Building a country M&E system and operating it are interrelated and partly overlapping processes. This is why the idea of an M&E system being first of all comprehensively designed at the drawing board and only then fully operated would be mistaken. What is more, building M&E systems never starts from scratch; there are always already certain elements to build on.

Four dimensions of the process need to be distinguished. These are by their nature conceptual, operational, resourcing-oriented and political respectively.

- An M&E system needs, first of all, a wide range of conceptual and normative underpinnings, reference points and plans. It starts with policies, strategies and other orientations regarding the areas or sectors to be monitored and evaluated, defining, in particular, the objectives and results to be achieved. A second conceptual requirement is a description of an adequate institutional architecture for M&E, with clear assignments of roles and responsibilities as well as provisions for coordination and cooperation. Third, specific M&E elements and activities need to be outlined and guided. This concerns areas of observation and corresponding key indicators, data collection, analysis and reporting (including methodologies, timelines and cost considerations), as well as transparency, dissemination of findings and quality control processes of the M&E system itself. Last but not least, there is a need to design appropriate strategies with regard to resourcing the M&E effort, including human capacity needs. The activities being conducted in all these processes are mainly thinking and negotiating (with the aim of agreeing), and the results manifest themselves first and foremost on paper.
- The second process dimension is operational, i.e. the M&E system and its parts operating. Based on and guided by the aforementioned conceptual frameworks, the starting point here is to gather baseline data on indicators

to describe and measure the initial situation. Later on, main steps in the process are (with the required periodicity) data collection and analysis, reporting of findings, disseminating the information to the appropriate users, using the findings for the improvement of performance and for core functions such as budget decision-making and the management of programmes and projects, feedback on the quality of information provided and how the data are being used, and finally reviewing and – if necessary – adjusting the M&E system.

These two process dimensions – the conceptual and the operational – are usually brought into focus when processes around country M&E systems are discussed. However, there are two other dimensions that oftentimes tend to be overlooked, although they are decisive factors, in particular in developing-country contexts:

- The third dimension is the resourcing dimension. It includes human and financial resources and decides to a large extent how much of the conceptual is put into practice or, in other words, how much of it remains on paper. Human resources for M&E must be recruited, appropriately deployed and retained. The individual employee must have the necessary capacities and assume his/her responsibilities. Where there is a lack of trained and skilled human resources, considerable efforts need to be undertaken to fill the gaps in a reasonable amount of time. In addition, fi-

nancial resources must be mobilised at a sufficient level and appropriately allocated to cover all relevant costs in connection with planning and implementation of the M&E system. This includes costs associated with the elaboration of concepts and plans, the institutional infrastructure for M&E, the salaries of the required personnel, training and capacity development, M&E events as well as materials and equipment.

- Finally, none of the aforementioned processes, and in particular not the

adequate resourcing of the M&E effort, will proceed as required as long as there is no sufficiently strong and consistent political commitment and support. Organising and securing this support is also a process dimension of the M&E effort, one that is political. Political support needs to be constantly generated and garnered from many governmental and non-governmental sources, harnessed, anchored and sustained over time, also when a new political administration comes into office.

3. International context and commitments

Building and sustaining partner country M&E systems for decentralisation is in important ways linked to key global development frameworks and commitments of the past 10 years and the recently adopted 2030 Agenda with its set of Sustainable Development Goals. This is relevant for two reasons: First, such concerted efforts proclaimed at high level can provide a stimulus for action and help move an issue forward. Second, specific commitments that developing countries and DPs entered into were connected with monitoring frameworks and dedicated indicators to enable the tracking of the extent to which obligations are being met. Thus, in the case of some commitments with relevance for country M&E systems entered into in Paris, Accra and Busan, there is already some aggregate information available on the degree of progress made. It is presented here briefly before taking the analysis to a more detailed level. Such insights are at this point not yet available from the incipient post-2015 framework. But it is significant for the issues discussed in this paper insofar as it further emphasises the importance of the sub-national level and local actors in results monitoring, and this could also benefit M&E of decentralisation and create further stimulus for it.

3.1 Managing for results and country systems as parts of aid effectiveness

Country M&E systems⁴ are not a new phenomenon. From the late 1990s onwards, it was generally agreed that developing countries should have their own M&E systems to provide for better evidence, policies and development results. This shift was influenced by a number of factors. Some developing countries, in Latin America in particular, consciously adopted new trends and best practice approaches in public sector reform of OECD countries. At that time, this included results-based management as a way to put strong evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation (“evidence-based policy making”). In most developing countries, however, the move towards country M&E systems accrued primarily from shifts in aid paradigms and innovations in aid modalities, in particular the World Bank’s debt relief initiative for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), the international community’s emphasis on achievement of the MDGs and the shift from narrowly but clearly defined projects and project outputs toward programme-based approaches and joint financing. All these innovations required

4 An M&E system can be characterised as a “country system”, as “country-led” or “national” when it is – or should be – run by the country and its competent public authorities themselves rather than being driven by a foreign actor or institution. It is a “system” when it consists of elements that are interdependent and purposefully linked. Terms that are often used interchangeably are “evidence-based policy-making” and “results-based management”.

more focus on big-picture results, which, in turn, required a greater reliance on country systems for national statistics and for M&E of government programmes.

Many of the new demands and requirements concerning M&E were bundled in the early 2000s by the Managing for Development Results (MfDR) Initiative as part of the then-nascent aid effectiveness discourse. It promoted better measurement, monitoring and management for results by providers of development cooperation and developing countries and led to an ambitious program of activities, including several high-level conferences. Consequently, in 2005, MfDR was included as one of five pillars in the Paris Declaration (PD).⁵ Later on, “results” figured also prominently in the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action and even more in the Busan Partnership Agreement of 2011.⁶

Closely related to the results focus was the notion of “country systems” and the use of such systems. The PD stated that in order to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies,

developing countries must be equipped with certain “country systems”, including in the area of results frameworks, statistics, monitoring and evaluation.⁷ In addition, it called for the use of these systems by international development partners to the maximum extent possible in order to strengthen partner country’s sustainable capacity to develop, implement and account for their policies to their citizens and parliaments. Further commitments were drawn up with regard to the support DPs were expected to give to developing countries in this field. As in the case of “results”, these commitments were further reinforced in Accra and Busan. All these factors combined tended to increase the level of involvement of DPs in building and strengthening developing countries’ M&E systems.

3.2 Developing countries’ progress in establishing results frameworks

The surveys and evaluations of the implementation of the Paris Declaration (OECD 2007, 2008, 2011; OECD/

5 In order to monitor progress, an indicator on results-oriented frameworks was designed to track the extent to which developing countries established transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks to measure progress against national and sectoral development strategies. The indicator read: “Number of countries with transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks to assess progress against (a) the national development strategies and (b) sector programmes.” This indicator was later (2008) redefined to focus on the use of country results frameworks by DPs.

6 Note that the terminology for country M&E systems used in the Paris Declaration and the ensuing reports and documents changed over time, from “performance assessment frameworks” via “results-based monitoring frameworks” and “results-oriented frameworks” through to “results frameworks”.

7 Other country systems concerned notably the areas of public financial management and procurement.

Box 2: Limited progress in results systems

Although some developing countries were making important progress in constructing results-oriented frameworks, the target established for 2010 was clearly missed. The percentage of countries considered having relatively strong results-oriented frameworks increased from 5% in 2005 to 21% in 2010. However, the target set was 36%. The 2011 survey report saw a certain “shift towards a stronger results culture in developing countries”, but added that “more efforts are needed to actually *implement* these frameworks” (OECD 2011: 94; emphasis added). In other words, much of the limited progress remained largely confined to the level of concepts, plans and architecture. Likewise, the 2011 evaluation observed “varying degrees of strengthening of results systems since 2005 and more efforts underway, but with limited effects in most cases” (Wood et al.

2011: 35). And a similar situation was also reported for the area of statistical capacity development. A majority of low-income countries had either developed a national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS) or were planning one, but the sustainability of these achievements remained an important source of concern because of insufficient funding and weaknesses in many strategies as well as lack of dissemination and use of improved statistics by decision makers (OECD 2011: 88).

The 2014 Progress Report of the Global Partnership (OECD/UNDP 2014) has added no new insights. Its focus with regard to results frameworks is no longer on the existence and quality of developing countries’ systems, but on their use by development partners.

UNDP 2014; Wood et al. 2008, 2011) revealed three major insights:

- The pace of progress in establishing and implementing results-based frameworks in developing countries has been utterly insufficient (Box 2).
- The degree of target attainment in the area of results frameworks was the lowest of all “country systems”, i.e. lower than those on systems for public financial management, procurement and national development policies.
- Out of the five partnership principles of the PD, managing for results (and

mutual accountability) had advanced least (Wood et al. 2011: 55).

Interestingly, when the 2008 survey revealed that only minimum progress had been made in managing for results since the baseline survey two years before, the authors took the view that political factors are the core of the problem. They underlined that results orientation is a “political variable” and that results monitoring succeeds when there is strong political leadership and high-level political interest and demand for monitoring information. Three years later, the 2011 evaluation criticized in a similar way a narrow focus on technicalities that

obscures the original broad intention of the principle (Wood et al. 2011: 53).

3.3 Development partners' progress in supporting and using country systems

From the very beginning, development partners were urged to help developing countries improve their statistical, monitoring and evaluation systems. Concerning this matter, the 2008 evaluation found that almost all development partners seemed to be “engaged in some sort of CD assistance that should strengthen managing for results [...] but these efforts appear piecemeal and often tied to the specific needs or areas of intervention of donors” (Wood et al. 2008: 22). In the area of statistical CD, development partners' support was reported to have increased while remaining concentrated on a small number of countries and coming only from a small number of DPs. Later investigations abstained from clear judgements as they saw only limited evidence to assess actual performance of development partners in these areas.

Concerning development partners' use of country M&E systems, the first PD evaluation contained, as early as 2008, a very nuanced description of the difficult situation of DPs. It observed that development partners' reliance on countries' results-oriented and monitoring frameworks is the exception, not the rule, and added for consideration that most developing countries lack sufficiently robust systems

as a basis. It furthermore diagnosed a need for development partners to report to specific constituencies on specific issues, which made them even more inclined to resort to parallel systems of their own. Preliminary feedback collected a few years later for the 2014 Progress Report suggested more variation, with DPs showing different levels of use, but in sum findings were inconclusive.

In sum, the overall picture emerging from these studies shows only modest accomplishments in establishing, implementing and DP's use of country M&E systems. Given the fact that a coordinated effort has been made over a fairly long period of time in which developing, strengthening and using such systems was (and still is) an integral component of the dominant international aid effectiveness paradigm, with explicit commitments made by developing countries and development partners alike, institutional structures for follow-up, institutionalised monitoring with indicators of progress and dedicated multi-donor CD programmes, this slowness of progress is providing ample food for thought. For M&E of decentralisation, where additional challenges are present, this is not encouraging. It would be surprising to detect there a significantly more dynamic development.

3.4 Localising the post-2015 agenda

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development. Although explicit references to the local level in the SDGs (and probably also in the upcoming SDG indicators) are few in number, there is a growing awareness that the local level will be important not only for the agenda's successful implementation, but also for monitoring progress towards targets and goals. This is partly due to experience made with MDG monitoring, where non-availability of disaggregated data was a major constraint.

Local governments will have a critical role in achieving the SDGs: much expenditure and investments in sustainable development are being devolved to the sub-national level, and most pro-poor public services are delivered there. The 2015 International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Art. 34) has acknowledged this as explicitly as never before. This means, at least implicitly, that it would also be important to measure progress locally, on the basis of disaggregated data that is impossible to collect exclusively through surveys conducted at the national level. Given the limited resources that are available so far in many countries for such large-scale statistical tasks at sub-national levels, a concerted effort will be needed over the next years to develop and strengthen the necessary institutional and human capacities and provide the required financial means. Consequently, the efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda are seen by many as having the potential to generate simultaneously considerable

momentum for a worldwide movement for better and open data. This has found its strongest expression in the call for a "data revolution" (IEAG 2014).

M&E of decentralisation could benefit from such global endeavour, especially with regard to the mobilisation of resources. Agendas for M&E of the SDGs and M&E of decentralisation are not fully congruent, but they share important interests, in particular a high demand for disaggregated data and capacity development at the local level. However, a concerted SDG-related M&E effort of the international community would also pose risks to nascent country M&E systems: risks of creating parallel data collection mechanisms, of stretching already limited human and financial resources and of undermining partner countries' national statistical systems and the attempts at strengthening the local level therein.⁸

However, it remains to be seen whether M&E of the SDGs will be taken more vigorously to subnational levels, as recommended by many experts (High-Level Panel 2013: 56; Lucci/ Bhatkal 2014: 17; SDSN Leadership Council 2015: 18). The most important prerequisites would be genuine political will of important actors to do so and perseverance in putting and keeping this issue on the international agenda.

8 This is what MDG monitoring did, according to some sources.

4. Country M&E for decentralisation – Needs and achievements

M&E development is still often narrowed down to technicalities, although it is increasingly acknowledged that the organisational and institutional dimensions of M&E are likely to be more influential and difficult to organise. In the following, country M&E systems for decentralisation are being analysed according to six broad M&E dimensions: (i) policy, (ii) indicators and data, (iii) institutionalisation and coordination, (iv) capacity and funding, (v) involvement of non-governmental actors, and (vi) use of M&E products. The analysis is based on two rounds of primary data collection in the summer and fall of 2014 (see footnotes 1 and 2), policy documents from developing countries and DP agencies as well as academic literature.

4.1 Policy

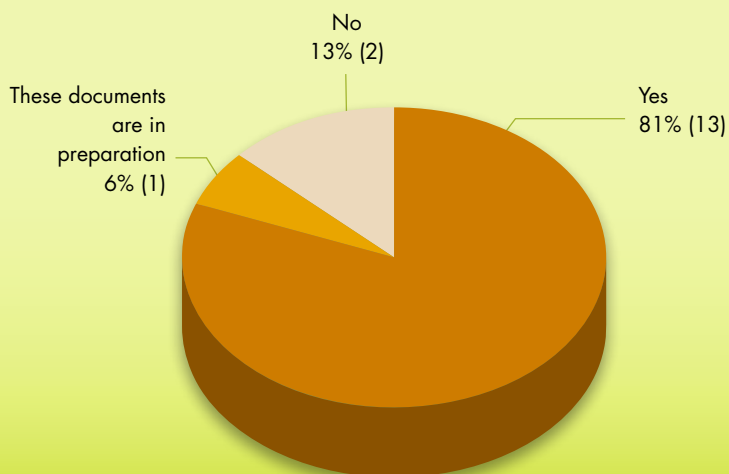
Like any other country M&E system, M&E of decentralisation needs to be based on policies, directives, strategies and other orientations. These set out the norms, rules and standards of the system, define what has to be measured, monitored and evaluated, why, how, by and for whom, and in which frequency. Efforts required to make the system work, including in the area of CD, should equally be outlined.

In the countries surveyed, valid comprehensive policies for M&E of decentralisation and dedicated plans for the establishment of an M&E system to support decentralisation reforms are scarcely

available. An exception is Burkina Faso, where a draft concept paper on setting up a national M&E system for decentralisation and a supplementary document with indicators for monitoring (MATD 2014a, 2014b) have recently been developed and are currently awaiting approval. Likewise, a manual for M&E of decentralisation is in the final stages of preparation in Benin.

National decentralisation policies, strategies and implementation plans can be a further source of M&E guidance. Remarkably enough, there are some decentralising countries among those surveyed where there is either no dedicated policy on decentralisation in place or the preparation and adoption of a new policy replacing an out-dated one has stalled. Thus, the surveyed experts' feedback, according to which 81% of the covered countries have a national decentralisation policy and/or strategy to which an M&E system can be related (see figure 1), seems somewhat overstating the case. In those cases where a decentralisation policy exists, references to M&E take different forms. The importance and intention of developing an M&E system is expressed throughout. Several policies mention explicitly the responsible institutions and some key tasks to be carried out in setting up the system. Some go even further and sketch out future performance measures and indicators, reporting schedules, elements of the future system's institutional structure as well as activities to be conducted and actors involved at national,

Figure 1: Is there in your country a national decentralisation policy and/or strategie to which the M&E system relates (or could be related)?



regional and local levels once the system is operational. Thus, although references to M&E in standard decentralisation policies cannot compensate the lack of a dedicated policy document on M&E of decentralisation, they are mostly more than a mere formality.

Another instructive exercise is to see whether and how the needs of decentralised M&E are considered in National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). Based on an international agreement reached at the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results in 2004 (the so-called Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics),

many countries, including the majority of those surveyed here, have adopted such documents as guidance for further development of their national statistical systems. The challenges and needs involved in better accompanying and supporting the processes of decentralisation, including new data demands, capacity constraints, inconstancy of statistical production at sub-national levels, insufficient accessibility of results of national surveys, the need to create adequate institutional frameworks and a presence of national statistical institutions at sub-national levels as well as the fundamental necessity of better coordination across levels and sectors, are quite present in these documents.

As with the decentralisation policies, references vary in detail, but the relevant problems are identified throughout and efforts to be undertaken to improve the situation are also set forth.

Finally, two of the countries surveyed (Burkina Faso and Niger) have dedicated CD strategies for the actors of decentralisation. Here, it is surprising that decentralisation actors' capacity needs in the area of M&E are largely neglected.

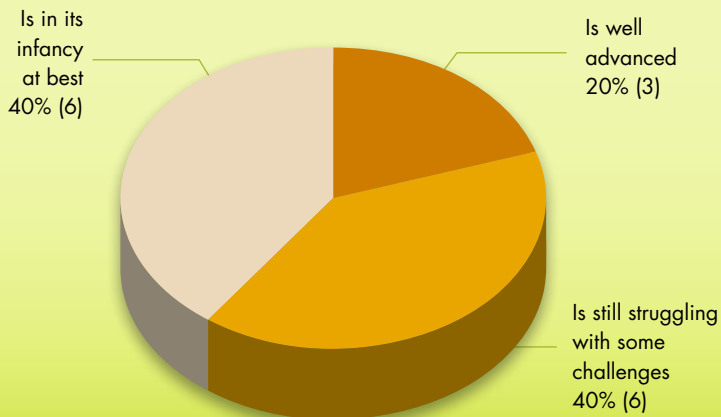
4.2 Indicators and data

Indicators and data collection are generally among the most developed aspects of M&E systems. To some extent, this is also true in the case of countries' M&E systems to support decentralisation reforms. However, countries are facing considerable challenges here. As the implementation of decentralisation covers wide-ranging political, administrative and fiscal reforms that involve various levels and a wide range of actors, there is a wealth of areas of observation for tracking of progress and performance assessment. Thus, impact indicators allowing judgements about big-picture progress are likely to be composite indicators that cross the line of the mission and area of competence of a single ministry. There are many data producers – from national statistical offices to deconcentrated services and local authorities, who generate data as a by-product of their general operations, to civil society actors and in-

ternational development partners – and many data users with different information needs. Much focus is on disaggregated data linked to sub-national units of accountability, but aggregation of data into regionally and nationally meaningful information is needed, too.

Many partner country M&E efforts and considerable parts of the related development partner support are devoted to the definition and compilation of indicators. To be sure, indicators are essential for any M&E scheme, but the danger is, particularly in complex decentralisation reform settings, that lists of indicators get out of hand because there are so many areas to be covered. Therefore, clarity in the definition of fields of observation and indicators is a key issue. In this regard, there are wide variations between countries. For some countries included in the survey, experts see indicators well advanced, while for others they see only incipient developments (see figure 2). Thus, the recommendation is to focus on a limited set of key indicators, adapted to the specific situation of the country. What is needed is a targeted approach that prioritises areas of observation of particular importance for the country's M&E effort and assigns a limited number of indicators to these areas. When selecting areas of observation and assigning indicators, it is important to take the interests and information needs of all relevant stakeholders at the various levels into account.

Figure 2: In your country, the definition of areas of observation and indicators ...



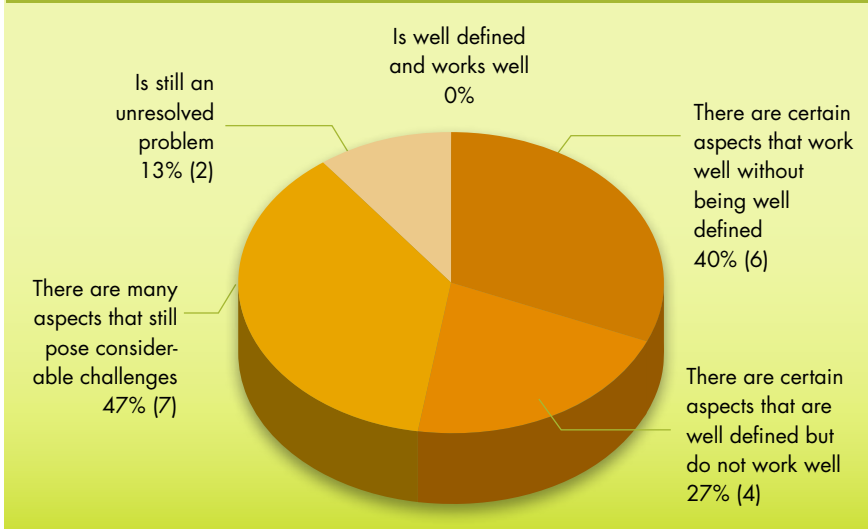
Good-quality indicators usually have the potential to give direction to the process of data collection. This is the case when they are linked from the very beginning to relevant data sources and based on a good understanding of what data are available and what it takes to make other data available that would be needed to measure the indicator's fulfilment.⁹ Where indicators are lacking this quality or are absent altogether, and where no other rules or standards for data collection are in place, data collection can turn easily into an aimless exercise. It comes

as no surprise, therefore, that none of the experts surveyed judges the clarity of the definition of data to be collected *and* the functioning of the collection process taken together favourably (see figure 3). In about half of the countries, at least one of the two gets a positive rating, while in the other countries both aspects are deemed largely problematic.

In effect, the practice of data collection is mostly not in line with national and international standards of statistics. Many of the collection tools needed are basically available in partner countries, and increasingly so in recent years, but often they are not used for the specific purpose

⁹ Exemplary in this regard is MATD (2014b).

Figure 3: The collection of information and data in your country ...



of M&E of decentralisation. It is often the systematic linking of various data sources that provides the main difficulty (Hutchinson/LaFond 2004: 53). There are quite a number of activities in data collection, but these are often lacking in constancy and sometimes limited to piloting exercises in certain local areas. Existing statistical data from large national surveys are often not territorially disaggregated, and the quality of administrative records of national ministries and their deconcentrated structures, an important data source, is often questionable. Data collection efforts at the local level are still too often limited to activities that serve the interests of national authorities. In more

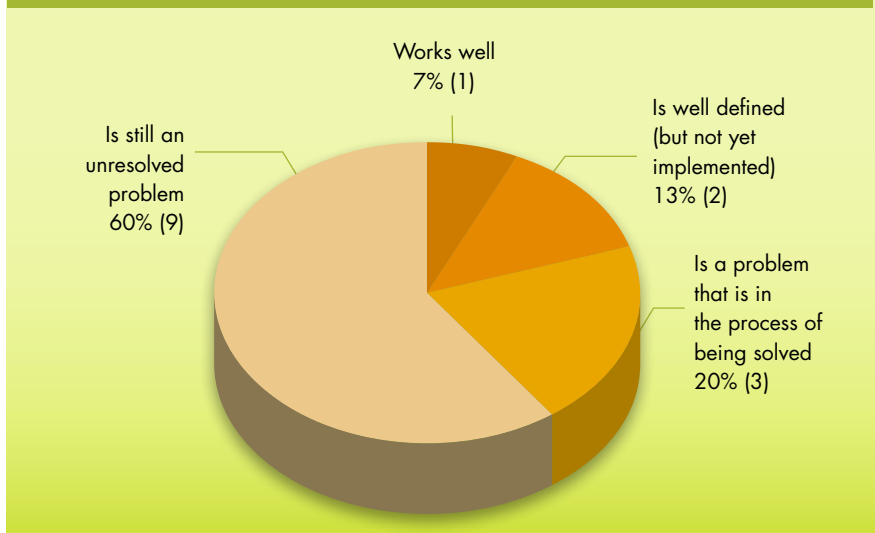
than a few places there is a proliferation of uncoordinated and piecemeal data collection initiatives, which, in sum, produce incoherent information. Under such circumstances, the quality, coverage, representativity, up-to-dateness, and reliability of data suffer, although there are indications that in some countries data quality tends to improve.

Particularly weak is the link between data collection and data processing.¹⁰ Like many general national M&E systems and sector M&E systems in HIV/AIDS, health and agriculture (Anderson et al. 2015: 12), the nascent M&E systems for decentralisation usually do not specify rules

or standards for data aggregation or a process for data verification. In practice, much of the data that is currently available and spread over various databases is not analysed and otherwise processed at all. This also means that where monitoring exercises and data sources overlap, this is rarely used for crosschecking or tri-

angulation. Consequently, even cautiously positive perceptions of this area (“well defined, but not yet implemented”) are quite rare among the experts surveyed. For nine countries out of fifteen, this field appears as a “largely unresolved problem” (see figure 4).

Figure 4: The processing and analysis of information and data in your country ...



10 The data processing stage is where raw data is transformed into meaningful information to be understood by users. It includes (i) validation = ensuring that supplied data is clean, correct and useful; (ii) sorting = arranging items in some sequence and/or in different sets; (iii) summarisation = reducing detail data to its main points; (iv) aggregation = combining multiple pieces of data; (v) analysis = inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information; (vi) reporting = list detail or summary data or computed information; (vii) classification = separate data into various categories.

4.3 Institutionalisation and coordination

More often than not, the organisational and institutional dimensions rather than M&E technicalities are the sore spot in partner countries' M&E systems (Holvoet/Inberg 2015: 139). One of the crucial elements in this regard is the establishment of an appropriate institutional structure providing support, overview and coordination for the multitude of actors involved in data collection, reporting, analyses, feedback and use of M&E findings. Since M&E of decentralisation involves by definition national and local plus intermediate (regional, district etc.) levels, efficient institutional and coordination mechanisms are particularly important.

The institutional setup of any country M&E system consists of organizational units, mechanisms (and their interplay) that serve to develop and operationalize the system and conduct or manage M&E exercises. Ideally, a key figure at the highest level of government (head of state or prime minister) takes a prominent stance as leading promoter of the M&E effort. The tasks of policy direction, central oversight and political steering of the M&E system at the government level are usually assigned to an agency with crosscutting authority such as the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Planning. Under its overall direction, individual (sector) ministries are expected to organize and steer M&E in their respective areas of responsibility. A high-level committee for M&E,

either situated within the central agency or designed as an inter-ministerial body, is often added to ensure a continuous process on a daily basis with the required technical competence, including the coordination of partnerships with external actors willing to support the country's M&E effort. National Statistical Offices are important providers of data as well as expertise around data collection, processing, analysis and storage. National Audit Offices conduct their own performance audits, but can also be tasked to ensure the quality, objectivity, credibility, and rigor of the data and information the M&E system produces. Universities and schools of public administration play a key role in promoting the comprehension of M&E and imparting M&E knowledge through formal training. In the societal realm, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), think tanks and the media can play important roles in M&E of government performance and as producers and providers of M&E information. Similarly, where private service provision is concerned, the private sector can play multiple roles, including as provider of data and object of M&E activities. Finally, National Associations of Evaluation are growing in number and membership. As communities of practice they have the potential to influence the quality of M&E work.

In M&E systems for decentralisation, the basic configuration of actors is quite similar, but there are also some specific features: First, institutions with key respon-

sibilities for M&E of decentralisation at the national level are, of course, the ministry in charge of decentralisation and the ministry of finance (due to its responsibilities regarding the implementation of fiscal decentralisation) and occasionally other ministries, as well as in many cases an interministerial body, committee or conference for decentralisation with coordinating and technical steering functions in the M&E effort. In addition, there are non-governmental decentralisation-specific actors operating at the national level, first and foremost National Associations of Local Governments.

Second, the list of relevant actors is extended by the fact that decentralisation requires by definition the inclusion of sub-national levels and actors. Hence the imperative involvement of genuine sub-national actors in M&E: dedicated organs tasked to lead the M&E effort at regional and local levels, locally elected officials (mayors, councillors) and local administration as well as – in systems with a strong element of deconcentration – departmental prefects and administrations, regional councils and development agencies and deconcentrated technical services of the central government.

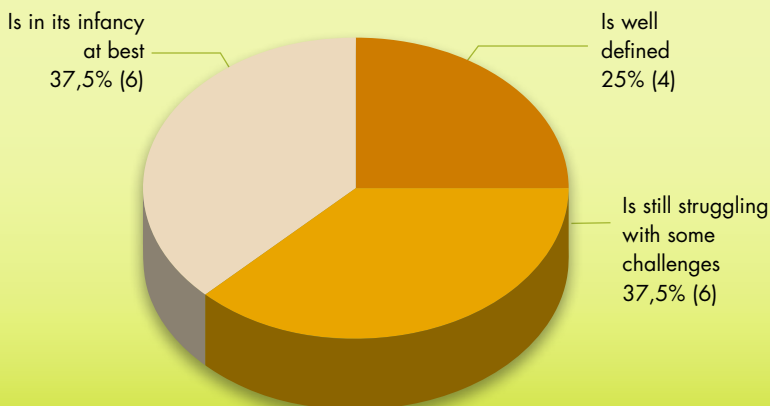
Third, depending on the size of the country and the maturity of the decentralisation process, decentralised entities of national institutions such as sub-national offshoots of National Statistical Offices (who acquire additional tasks in decentralised M&E systems as training and

quality assurance providers) and Schools of Administration can play a role. Finally, and of particular importance, there is a demand for dedicated organs tasked with the linking of levels and coordination of M&E across these levels: focal points and dedicated M&E units at the various levels.

Developing and implementing a viable institutional setup for M&E of decentralisation and ensuring the necessary coordination still poses considerable challenges for the majority of countries. The ministry in charge of decentralisation is often too weak politically (and sometimes also technically) to take a prominent stance and to effectively coordinate the M&E effort. This is one of the reasons why so many activities so far remain confined to the conceptual level, with no or limited implementation. Thus, only a small number of the surveyed experts describe their countries' institutional framework for M&E of decentralisation as well defined (see figure 5). They are clearly outnumbered by those who either see this setup still as "in its infancy at best" or take a middle-position and acknowledge some progress with remaining challenges.

A specific challenge is the linkage with sectoral M&E efforts. Although being a cross-sectoral reform, important outcomes of decentralisation must manifest themselves at the sectoral level, especially in the improvement of service delivery in areas such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation. Therefore, M&E of decentralisation needs to interact closely

Figure 5: The institutional framework of the country M&E system for decentrali-sation (structures, actors, their interplay etc.) in your country ...



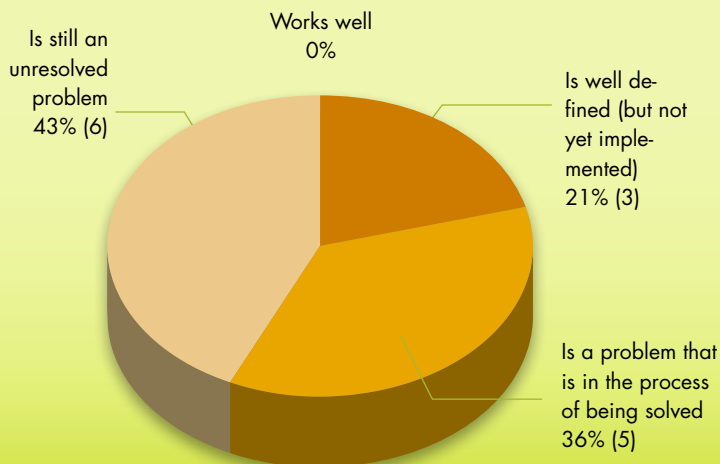
with sectoral policies, reforms and M&E, as well as with programmes and projects that support these sectors. This applies to all sectors where competences and resources are transferred to lower levels of government. Corresponding and complementary reforms in public service and public financial management are further realms to be considered. Lack of connection and coherence with sector reforms is a common weakness of decentralisation in developing countries. This manifests itself also in M&E. Nowhere does the linkage of the M&E system in decentralisation – or rather those elements of a potential system that are already operational – and sectoral M&E systems and data work

well. For most surveyed countries this connection is deemed problematic, either as an unresolved problem or as a problem that is being examined (see figure 6). Only for three countries, perceptions are more positive (“well defined, but not yet implemented”).

4.4 Capacity and funding

For the establishment of a country M&E system and its implementation and operation, a great number of actors and stakeholders are in need of certain capacities. These include in particular technical (e.g. analytical, statistical), institu-

Figure 6: The linkage of M&E of decentralisation with sectoral M&E systems and data in your country ...



tional and managerial aspects. Building the necessary capacity for M&E activities in partner country structures is one of the main challenges to institutionalising M&E systems. Especially where hiring of qualified staff is concerned, it is closely related to funding issues, which are, in turn, a challenge in itself.

4.4.1 Capacity

Capacity is not simply one ingredient of a country M&E system among others. It is of structural importance for the entire system and a decisive factor in the absence or presence of every single element of the system and its quality. Capacity requirements in M&E go far beyond statistics and

data analysis. It is not enough to create a highly trained technical M&E capacity for data collection and aggregation, which are the most basic capacities necessary for a functioning M&E system, and for more sophisticated aspects such as data verification and the setting up of information and communication technology (ICT), and expect that institutions and the system as a whole will eventually become more effective. There is also a need for coordination capacity and – both on the part of government institutions and among other stakeholders – for capacity to demand and use M&E information. This requires clarity of expectations regarding where and how M&E information could and

should be used (e.g. planning, policy or program development, decision-making, budgeting) and the ability to actually incorporate M&E information as part of the normal process of business. It is therefore important that not only technical M&E experts, but also non-technical personnel (e.g. program managers, but also activists in civil society organizations) have a suitable appreciation of M&E concepts. Insufficient capacities in this broad sense are a major obstacle to more substantial progress on country M&E systems.

Many partner countries face all sorts of capacity shortages, and M&E is no exception (Anderson et al. 2015: 11). Thus, virtually all countries surveyed are facing major capacity constraints both in the area of M&E and in the area of decentralisation, and consequently also at the intersection of both. Particular scarcity exists at decentralised levels where actors lack the resources and responsibility to take the necessary corrective measures themselves, and with regard to evaluative capacity due to a general tendency for monitoring to crowd out evaluation (Holvoet/Inberg 2015: 137). However, there are also “pockets” of M&E expertise in many countries, even in the poorest, that is often under-recognised. This expertise needs to be nurtured, used and spread out more systematically.

4.4.2 Funding

Establishing and running a country M&E system requires a long-term commitment and considerable and sustained financial

investments, even before the benefits of the work can be reaped on a large scale. Developing countries usually evade large expenditures for M&E, including their National Statistical Offices, be it because of financial constraints, or for lack of commitment to the very idea of developing a systematic approach to M&E, or because there are international development partners who are willing to take over the lion share of the costs. As a matter of fact, resorting to injections of DP funding is in many cases the only way to get a determined effort in M&E going, and in many countries nearly all core data collection activities are funded primarily by external sources (Glassman/Ezeh 2014). But this comes at a price. It creates dependence on development partners, hampers the emergence of country ownership, and risks developing piecemeal M&E initiatives and tools that are not sustainable individually and not sufficiently coherent as a whole – which is, in the end, a waste of resources.

This general description of the situation of country M&E systems also holds true for M&E systems to support decentralisation reforms. Inadequate funding severely limits the prospects for substantial improvements.

4.5 Involvement of non-governmental actors

The presence and functioning of an M&E supply and demand outside of govern-

ment structures is generally considered to be important for country M&E systems, especially for the key objectives of learning and accountability. Non-governmental actors in M&E typically include organisations and other institutions of civil society as well as international development partners. In addition, there is potential to engage private sector stakeholders in M&E of decentralisation that is largely overlooked.

4.5.1 Civil society

In the societal realm, NGOs, academic institutions and the media can play important roles in M&E, as contributors to demand for M&E, active participants in the development of M&E policies and guidelines, watchers of government performance as well as producers and providers of M&E information. A vibrant civil society that demands and champions the values and ethics that underlie a successful M&E system, namely transparency, objectivity, accountability and good governance, is an important element in an enabling environment. It can put pressures on governments by demanding to publicly report and explain their performance. In this way, M&E provides a vehicle to magnify the voice of civil society and its organisations. Activities to produce and provide M&E information cover a wide area ranging from participatory approaches such as Community-Based Monitoring (GIZ 2014b) and initiatives such as citizen report cards to carrying out of extensive evaluations contracted out by governments to academia.

In the area of M&E of decentralisation in the countries surveyed, however, there is scant evidence for a substantive role of civil society institutions. They seem neither strongly involved in demanding more effective M&E, nor are large amounts of data being collected in collaboration with civil society. There is also no convincing evidence contained in decentralisation policies or in Burkina Faso's dedicated draft plan for M&E of decentralisation for an intention to assign an important role in M&E to civil society. One reason for this relatively low profile could be that decentralisation is essentially a state (and very much state-centred) reform, to which civil society organisations have difficulty relating to, especially as long as this reform is immature and not socially grounded.

4.5.2 Private sector

In areas of service delivery that are being decentralised, there is potential for cooperation around M&E with the private sector (and parastatals), e.g. commercial utilities and other private-sector stakeholders, particularly at the local level. They too rely on M&E, they gather their own data (especially baseline data), and they conduct their own evaluations in their respective service sectors. Although seldom practised so far, win-win cooperation on M&E with the private sector is an avenue worth more exploration in the future, not least in view of the financial and human resource constraints that limit so many public M&E efforts. Certain surveys could be carried out jointly, data and expenses could be shared.

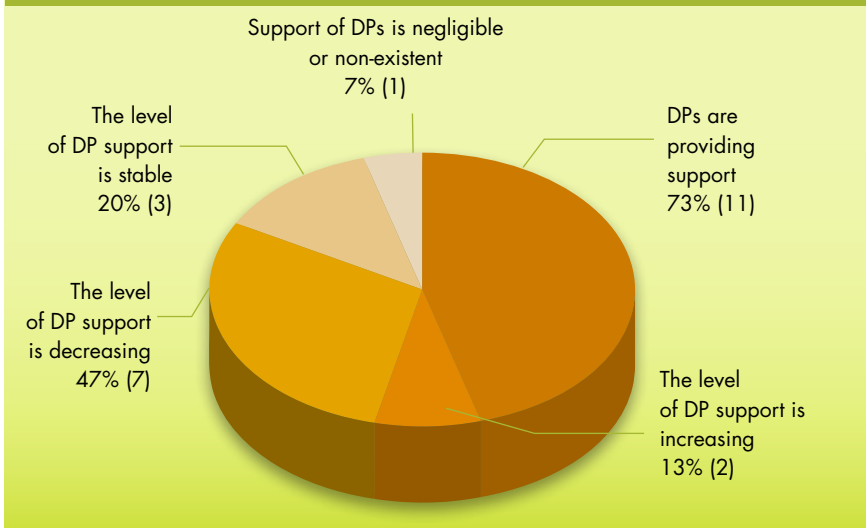
4.5.3 International development partners

Influence of DPs on the development of country M&E systems can be quite strong. Many countries receive considerable technical and financial support, ranging from piecemeal initiatives and projects, advice and funding of individual events, trainings and studies to financial contributions to large-scale multi-donor programmes and trust funds, e.g. for statistical capacity development. This assistance can be a blessing or a curse. It is mostly essential to get a determined effort in M&E going, but frequently it is also fragmented, sporadic and incoherent in terms of levels of interventions, modalities and targeted regions. Parallel M&E systems are set up by different DPs, often measuring the same

outcomes. This does not only increase the costs of programmes and projects but also undermines and weakens national M&E efforts and systems. Different M&E philosophies, aid modalities, targeted tiers of government and reporting requirements can hamper further harmonisation, but there are also examples of increasing coordination among DPs in M&E of decentralisation. While DP support is often insufficiently aligned with partner countries' needs, sometimes these needs themselves are insufficiently concrete and partner countries' policies, strategies and planning processes contradictory.

Cases where there is no or only negligible DP support are rare. Yet the surveyed

Figure 7: Concerning the support by international development partners for M&E in decentralisation in your country ...



experts' descriptions of DP practice are multifaceted. While in some cases progress in M&E of decentralisation is reported to take place mainly or only in regions where there is DP support, there are other cases where this support is characterised more critically as being volatile and erratic. Disturbingly, tendencies of decreasing DP support to partner countries' efforts in the area of M&E of decentralisation seem to be more frequent than increases in assistance (see figure 7).

4.6 Use of M&E products

The bottom-line measure of success of a country M&E system is the extent to

which M&E information is actually used to improve performance, for learning and accountability. However, on the ground there is relatively little evidence of M&E findings being systematically used, particularly at the local level.

This is related to the small number of presentable M&E products on decentralisation that have been developed so far. Due to the widespread shortage of capacities, funding and a variety of impediments to effective data collection and processing, there is almost no reliable periodic production of M&E outputs on the progression and results of the decentralisation process under way. In four of the countries surveyed, efforts in M&E

Figure 8: Which are the tangible results produced so far by the country M&E system in decentralisation or by the elements of M&E existing in your country?

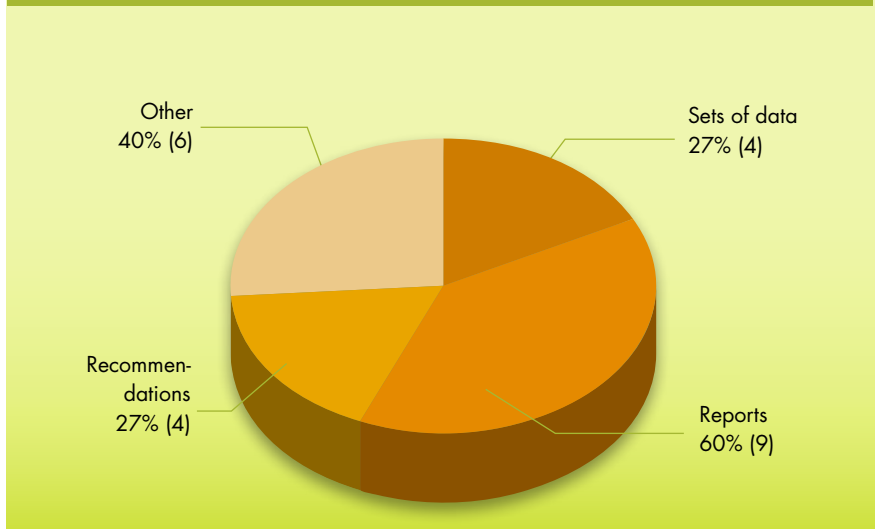
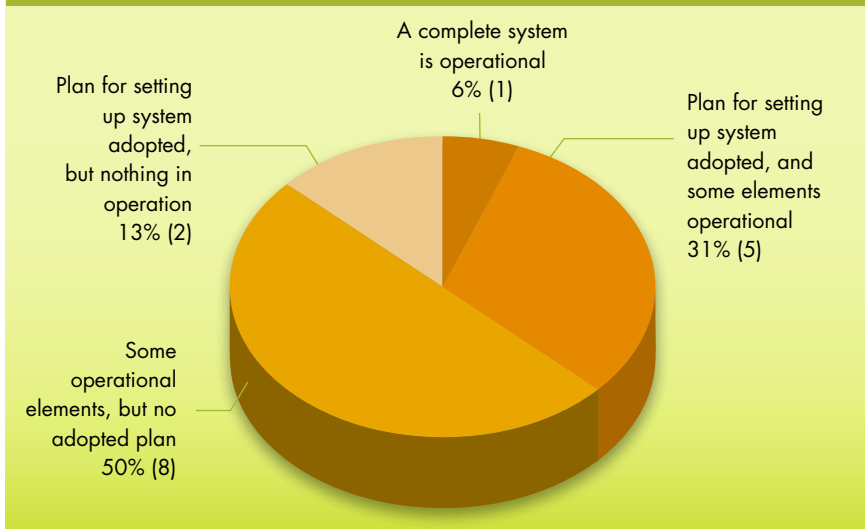


Figure 9: What is the current state of setting up a country M&E system for decentralisation in your country?



of decentralisation are not sufficiently advanced to develop any concrete products (see figure 8). Instead, certain statistical products often exist that are not specifically focused on decentralisation but have nevertheless some relevance in this context. This can be, for instance, regional statistical yearbooks, local budget analyses or studies on municipalities' poverty profiles that contain data from sub-national sources on service provision in decentralised sectors such as education and health. More specifically on decentralisation, in some countries one finds also scattered studies, sometimes of an exploratory nature, assessments of local authorities' performance and

progress reports, for instance mid-term evaluations of decentralisation policies. Usually, their findings and recommendations can also be presented to the competent authorities.

However, this does not automatically entail their use for more evidence-based steering of the decentralisation process, for reconsideration of current approaches or as a trigger for necessary adjustments. There is often insufficient consultation between producers and potential users of M&E data as well as little direction on how ministries and administrations are expected to actually implement. And there are also cases where reports and

their findings and recommendations are simply not considered.

4.7 Summarising the current state

The present situation of country M&E systems in decentralisation can be summarised as a mixture of considerable efforts and some achievements on the one hand and striking deficiencies on the other. Starting with the positive, in every analysed decentralising country, M&E is of concern, in some form or other. Apart from the officially stated and documented intention to create such an M&E system, there are exploratory studies, piecemeal M&E elements that could be integrated in a future system, “pockets” of M&E expertise, beginnings of networks, now and then an M&E unit in a national ministry or an M&E “cell” at sub-national levels. All countries seem to be somehow on the way, albeit at different stages and with different degrees of momentum and progress.

What is striking, however, is how many efforts are still confined to the level of plans and concepts. There is much more on paper than in operation. In addition, there is an enormous imbalance in practical action: there are quite a number of activities in data collection and processing, but comparatively few presentable products and even fewer examples of use of M&E findings. Moving from concept to implementation, and then beyond engagement in data-related activities poses considerable challenges.

This means that a full-fledged country M&E system for decentralisation is nowhere operational (see figure 9). None of the surveyed countries is equipped with a working system that comes close to the models usually depicted in handbooks and guidance papers – which, by the way, is also indicative of where the ownership of these models resides.

5. Future directions

The need for further improvement in assessing the results, outcomes and impacts of decentralisation, including the related support, is unabated. But as discussed in this paper, there are many obstacles for partner countries trying to establish their own M&E systems in decentralisation as well as international development partners willing to support them. As a consequence, advances have been relatively modest and slow. There are many piecemeal initiatives, but few examples of purposefully linked and interlocking M&E elements and activities run by the partner country and its competent public authorities, despite the considerable efforts invested over the past years. The discrepancy between efforts undertaken and progress made suggests that “more of the same” is unlikely to deliver better results. Therefore, in the remainder of this paper, a new departure for developing and operating M&E systems in decentralisation and the related DP support is outlined. Two propositions take centre stage: requirements and expectations vis-a-vis these systems must be scaled down to bring M&E closer to country realities and a stronger focus on the political economy of M&E in decentralisation is needed.

5.1 Settling for “good enough” country M&E systems

Just as decentralisation reforms are complex, so, too, are the M&E systems ideally needed to support them. However, in the light of the experience gained and

in view of the fact that most industrialised countries are themselves still struggling for satisfactory solutions for country M&E systems, the key question is how adequate country M&E systems in decentralisation can be established and implemented in developing countries without falling into the traps of over-ambition and over-engineering. Similar to the debate on “good enough governance” launched a decade ago (Grindle 2004, 2007), it is time to start questioning the length and the complexity of the “national M&E systems” agenda. Not all M&E deficits in a country need to be (or can be) tackled at once, and institution-building and capacity development are products of time. “Good enough country M&E systems in decentralisation” directs attention to considerations of minimum requirements that are necessary to allow more progress in this area to occur. What follows are ten action-oriented principles that international development partners should follow and promote when supporting partner country M&E efforts in decentralisation:

1. Acknowledge that there are limits for improving countries’ M&E systems, and give the necessary time to overcome obstacles. – Their construction and operationalisation is faced with numerous challenges and deficiencies that tend to be mutually reinforcing. In the case of M&E to support decentralisation reforms, these challenges are particularly demanding. Resources (time, human, financial) for their removal are limited. Therefore, two

things are needed: The first is a deliberately limited approach focusing on areas where progress is likely to make a difference. The second is a pace of development of M&E infrastructure that gives the necessary time to overcome the wide range of technical obstacles. Even with sufficient political will and a serious resource commitment to invest in M&E development, technical hurdles may require a lengthy and iterative process: to put in place and develop credible data systems, train needed M&E specialists, and educate managers throughout the system on how and where M&E information will be used. This is generally a process where receptiveness to continuous learning and improvement through oversight mechanisms is particularly beneficial.

2. Take cost considerations seriously. – Constructing and operating a country M&E system cost money and require a considerable and sustained investment. At the same time, most partner countries are weak economically and financially, and the expenses for M&E need to be kept or brought in line with desired and expected gains. It is therefore imperative to include the cost aspect in any consideration about how to organise M&E and where to set priorities. This is all the more the case where the lion share of the cost of M&E is borne by international development partners and partner countries are expected to take over at some point.
3. Take sustainability considerations seriously. – The world is full of projects and investments that failed because they were oversized or otherwise out of sync with the context for which they were conceived. This applies not only to unproductive factories, unused buildings and infrastructure, but also to the conceptualisation and organisation of processes in public administration, including M&E. Financial sustainability needs to be taken into consideration (see above), but there are other aspects as well. M&E tools, for instance, that are easily understood and applied by actors with diverse educational and professional backgrounds – including actors and stakeholders at the local level – lend themselves to more sustainable use than complex tools (Loquai/Le Bay 2007: 13).
4. Build on, rationalise and further improve M&E elements that are already there. – As Mackay (2007: 50, 57) underlined, it is rarely if ever the case that a country that decides to create an M&E system has to start from scratch. Even in the poorest countries there are usually piecemeal M&E elements that could be integrated in a future system, e.g. a range of performance indicators, a certain number of exploratory studies or evaluations as well as “pockets” of M&E expertise and familiarity with some tools. The problem is more the poor quality and partial coverage of information and its substantial under-utilisation. So the challenge these coun-

tries face is not so much developing entirely new systems, but rationalising, improving, learning from and expanding what already exists. In order to learn from existing tools, more efforts to document and disseminate these tools have to be made. In the area of decentralisation, for instance, many noteworthy initiatives that involve local stakeholders in designing and testing of specific tools have already been undertaken, but have left almost no marks, neither in the respective countries nor for a wider audience and the regional and international debate, for lack of documentation.¹¹

5. Focus on a limited set of key indicators, adapted to the specific situation of the country. – Many partner country M&E efforts and considerable parts of the related DP support are devoted to the development and compilation of indicators. While indicators are essential in any M&E scheme, the great danger in M&E of decentralisation is that the list of indicators to be used

gets out of hand for the simple reason that there are so many areas to be covered. What is needed therefore is a targeted approach that prioritises objectives and areas of observation and assigns a limited number of indicators. When selecting indicators, it is important to have sound and transparent criteria. These should include availability and manageability of data, the importance and comprehensibility of information generated by the use of an indicator (is it measuring results that key stakeholders care about?) and the well-known SMART¹² criteria. Process-wise, it is essential in a decentralising environment that the interests, information needs and intended uses of M&E information of all relevant stakeholders at the various levels are taken into account. This could be accomplished by a multi-tiered, but yet manageable indicator system, with a limited number of agreed overarching indicators, and a few specific indicators that serve the interests of particular actors and stakeholders.

11 A few years ago, Loquai/Le Bay (2007: 4) observed that development organisations were then – more than in the 1990s – willing to experiment with methodological approaches and tools aimed to reinforce local actors’ capacities to monitor and evaluate decentralisation and local accountability structures: “Recent enquiries in the West African region have uncovered noteworthy initiatives that involve local stakeholders of decentralisation in designing and testing such tools. However, as many of these efforts have gone undocumented for a wider audience, they have been largely unnoticed in the regional and international debate. Moreover, there has been little discussion of these experiences, even among development organisations and their partners within the region.”

12 In connection with indicators, the acronym SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (OECD 2010: 10).

6. Take a stepwise approach to articulating institutional mechanisms. – In a country M&E system in decentralisation, institutional mechanisms linking national and sub-national levels are particularly important, but also prone to failure. Depending on the country context, this may have to do with different expectations, interests and needs with regard to the M&E effort and also with differences in perceptions of roles and responsibilities of actors at other levels. It is therefore important to carefully reconcile diverging visions and technical approaches. For the articulation of institutional mechanisms linking national and sub-national levels and actors, a stepwise approach moving from piloting to adjusting and expanding up to formalising is advisable. (In reality, the formalisation often comes first, before putting a mechanism's suitability to the test.)
7. Let partner countries build on their often under-recognised experience. – As discussed above, even in the poorest countries there is already a certain amount of M&E experience, with "pockets" of expertise. This needs to be nurtured, used and spread out systematically. Outside support retains an important place, but should be deployed with self-restraint in order not to incentivise partners to rely too much on outside resources. At the same time, DPs should critically examine their own practices where they create and maintain parallel M&E systems or even duplicate each other's efforts due to lack of harmonisation.
8. Search for, promote and use partnerships with peers in similarly placed countries. – Exchange of information and best practices, partnering and networking with and between "pockets" of expertise in the region and beyond can be important sources of learning and capacity development. In addition, peer learning and the example of good-performing and advanced neighbours can be a powerful motivator and driver of change, oftentimes much more effective than advice from "outsiders". In many parts of the world, there are already networks, umbrella organisations and projects and programmes funded by DPs that can be beneficial in this regard.
9. Focus on use. – Given that the bottom-line measure of success of a country M&E system is the extent to which M&E information is actually used to improve performance, it is surprising to see how comparatively little energy and resources are put into strategies and activities to incentivise M&E use. As Mackay (2007: 3) put it, "it is well understood that it is not enough to complete an evaluation report, make it publicly available, and assume that utilisation will somehow take care of itself". More needs to be done to ensure that findings from M&E are used intensively. This requires a proactive approach towards decision makers

and other stakeholders. In addition, it is important to not let technical inadequacies of existing systems and tools become an alibi for ignoring the evidence that is already there. This inclination can be particularly strong in areas such as M&E of decentralisation, where the challenges are so demanding. However, governments can move ahead in using evidence without waiting to establish best-practice statistical and information systems.

10. Undertake regular M&E of the emerging country M&E system itself. – In order to focus the M&E system on those factors that make it “good enough” and also to limit its size accordingly, it is key to regularly monitor and evaluate the emerging system. Once more, a focus on the extent to which M&E information is being used is helpful here. Where utilisation is low, it is necessary to identify the reasons, such as low awareness of its existence, a low level of demand for it, poor quality data that are considered unreliable, or a lack of staff able to analyse and act on the information. This helps also identify the steps necessary to improve supply or to increase the demand for M&E information.

5.2 Addressing the political economy of M&E in decentralisation

Where efforts at establishing country M&E systems in decentralisation are un-

der way, technical, capacity and resourcing challenges are joined by a political dimension that is not only difficult to address in itself, but also often the cause of these other deficiencies. However, in the discussion and practice of country M&E systems in decentralisation, too little consideration is given to identifying the political and institutional incentives that drive politicians, bureaucrats and other actors to support or oppose M&E efforts. Understanding opportunities and limitations of M&E in decentralisation and the implications for the support of DPs requires that these motivations as well as divergent interests of key actors are systematically addressed and taken into account.

What follows are eight action-oriented principles that international development partners should follow and promote when supporting partner country M&E efforts in decentralisation:

1. Acknowledge that the process of constructing and operating a country M&E system in decentralisation will mirror the difficulties of the decentralisation reform itself. – Decentralisation and its implementation is oftentimes politically controversial and divisive, and so is its systematic monitoring and evaluation. In both areas the same political logic is at work. This is why it would be naive to think that a country M&E system in decentralisation could be insulated against political pressure and strife surrounding the reform and be “better” than the reform itself. There will be no functional country M&E system

for a dysfunctional reform. To give an example, the integration of the sectoral dimension in a country M&E system in decentralisation cannot succeed in an environment where “sector decentralisation” is opposed by powerful actors and does not work.

2. Take tensions between different actors and between different levels into account. – Depending on their roles and responsibilities in the decentralisation process, national ministries, supervisory authorities, mayors and local councillors, civil society organisations, international development partners and all other stakeholders of country M&E systems have (at least partly) different interests in M&E, either in general or with regard to specific elements of the system. But in order for M&E to be successful, its findings and recommendations must be useful for authorities and stakeholders to apply. So if stakeholders are to use information emanating from M&E to take action, their interests must be considered in the design and workings of the system. This is why international development partners must have, even when targeting their M&E support only at one specific actor (e.g. the ministry in charge of decentralisation) or at one level (e.g. the local level), a good understanding of the entire constellation of relevant actors and interests in the (emerging) country M&E system. Otherwise there is a risk of their support being ineffective or even counter-productive.
3. Make sure the design and working of the M&E system serve the interests of national and local levels alike. – Interests in M&E in decentralisation are particularly likely not to be congruent between national and local officials. Typically, national officials are reluctant to the transfer of (more) responsibilities and resources to the local level and have an interest to prove that local authorities are not able to deliver, whereas local officials have an interest to demonstrate that national actors do not give them the means to fulfil their newly acquired responsibilities. However, it is often the national level (with the support of DPs) that dominates the design of country M&E systems in decentralisation, with insufficient account being taken of the needs and potential of local government and other local-level stakeholders. It is unlikely, that the resulting country M&E system is able to accommodate the range of existing M&E interests of different stakeholders.
4. Assign considerations of demand and incentives a central place. – Buy-in of key partner officials should be secured before a lot of effort is put into a country M&E system. Yet opposition (open or hidden) to producing information in a government on performance in connection with decentralisation and strengthening the basis for accountability is common. It is important to understand that it is largely their political and bureaucratic incentive structures that guide actors’ behaviour. This

incentive structure can change, and it can be purposefully influenced. In other words, strong incentives are necessary – and need to be put in place – if M&E is to be successfully institutionalized and sustained. There are different types of incentives, and the list of possible practical measures – in Mackay’s diction “carrots”, “sticks” and “sermons” (2007: 61-64) – is quite long.

5. Identify and support a committed and influential government champion for M&E at the ministerial and senior official level. – Where M&E is contested, as is often the case in decentralisation, having a champion (or, ideally, more than one) who occupies a powerful position in the government constitutes an important success factor. A champion exerts strong and consistent political leadership. He or she needs to have some understanding of M&E, in terms of tools and methods, and an appreciation of its potential usefulness for decision-making. A champion speaks, acts and writes on behalf of those responsible for the country’s M&E effort, to promote, protect and defend the creation and operation of a functional M&E system. However, a champion does not provide a guarantee of success. Government champions will eventually depart, perhaps unexpectedly, and the window of opportunity can close as quickly as it opened. This is why it can be important to institutionalise a country M&E system as rapidly

as possible, before the champions eventually depart.

6. Continue to emphasize, over and over again, that information can help improve policy-making and public management. – Regardless of the often-conflicting interests of different actors in decentralisation, this is the issue around which their views are most likely to converge. It is therefore a good starting point for reflecting on and discussing of what could be workable incentives.

7. Invest more in capacities of stakeholders at the local level. – The large majority of demanders of effective decentralisation are at the local level. They expect to benefit in various ways from the transfer and re-arrangement of responsibilities, resources and power that is the gist of any decentralisation reform. However, much of the decision-making power in connection with the reform lies at the national level. A similar constellation exists with regard to country M&E systems in decentralisation. While some M&E demand is likely to be found also at the national level, demands for stronger accountability are usually more powerfully presented and directly felt at the local level. As this can be an important incentive to improve performance and increase demand for M&E, CD at the local level should not only be offered for the better fulfilment of technical M&E tasks and responsibilities, but also

address these more strategic aspects and opportunities. The instrument of Community-Based Monitoring – even if applied only as a technical tool at the outset – has potential as a door opener for more inclusive approaches or even empowerment (GIZ 2014b).

8. Make stakeholders aware of their right to be regularly informed on the performance of their government. – Although not codified explicitly as a human right, the demand of being regularly informed on government performance reflects the fundamental premise that government is supposed to serve the people. In addition, information is essential to democracy at a number of levels. Democracy is, among other things, about accountability and good governance. The public has a right to scrutinise the actions of its leaders and to engage in full and open debate about those actions. It must be able to assess the performance of the government, and this depends on access to information about the state of

the economy, social systems and other matters of public concern. One of the most effective ways of addressing poor governance, particularly over time, is through open, informed debate. Furthermore, elections can never meet their goal – described under international law as ensuring that “(the) will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government” – if the electorate lacks access to information which enables it to form an opinion, inter alia about the performance of the current government.

- . In Sierra Leone, for example, while local councils have formal responsibility for primary healthcare provision, the central government in fact pays the salaries for all local health workers through the Ministry of Health. Since these services are delivered in a localized manner, Ministry of Health expenditures on the wages of local health staff were coded as direct expenditures on local health services by the central government.

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BUILDING COUNTRY MONITORING
AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS
TO SUPPORT DECENTRALISATION REFORMS
Current state and future direction



DECENTRALISATION &
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