

Capitalization of Experience Workshop and Planning Session, Beneficiary Assessment

Sep 30 – Oct 1, 2013, Bern, Switzerland

Overview

The objectives of the capitalization of experience workshop (Day 1) were to:

- Identify lessons from recent BA experiences
- Clarify selected key issues (according to expectations of participants) through joint analysis of experiences

Day 2 gathered a small sub-group of participants to focus more narrowly on their specific planning requirements regarding the use of a BA approach.

Day 1 – Learning from recent and current BA experiences, sharing perspectives on the future

Aside from the general objectives of the workshop, a first exercise was conducted to see where the interests of the participants were. This resulted in a set of expectations for the day around:

- Learning more about what a BA is and what are methods associated with it
- Reflecting on plans for the Latin America Learning Event based on other BA experiences
- Stimulate thinking on the role of BA in a possible second phase of the Swiss Water & Sanitation NGO Consortium (where several BA exercises are currently underway)
- Determining whether/how BA could help with an assessment of a Humanitarian Assistance intervention in Lebanon
- Sharing field experiences from recent and ongoing BA exercises
- Determining when/if a BA should be used and how it relates to other elements of M&E
- Identifying the added value of BA (at various levels and for various stakeholders)
- How BA can be institutionalized within SDC

Sharing recent BA experiences

Following this, Riff Fullan from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation presented results from BA exercises in Nepal and Ethiopia, and some thoughts on methodological learning from them. In the Nepal case, the Water Resources Management Project (WARM-P) of Helvetas Nepal was assessed, and in the second, the HEKS-supported project 'Rehabilitation & Improvement of Water Sources in the Borana region, Ethiopia' was assessed. In both cases, Riff Fullan and Martin Fischler from HSI provided backstopping support to national level facilitators and supported training of Citizen Observers (COs).

In the Nepal case, results on how community members perceived changes in their lives after the project intervention were presented. As the Ethiopia BA was still underway during the workshop, such results were not yet available. However, the main interest in the presentation was to reflect on experiences in using the BA approach in both cases.

BA in the SDC institutional context

Laurent Ruedin presented the current situation within SDC, situating the BA approach within broader institutional concerns around M&E and Quality Assurance. After situating BA in continuity with other participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) efforts among other donors and in the past, the presentation focused on the main messages linked with SDC rationale in promoting BA within its efforts for improved effectiveness and results orientation. BA is not only coherent with SDC overarching goal of fighting poverty and promoting empowerment but also with its approach to the results agenda. Finally BA is situated in the landscape of SDC PCM tools, at project level: BA is one of the three types of evaluation: external review (perspective from external expert), self evaluation (perspective of staff involved in implementation) and BA (perspective of primary stakeholders) and at cooperation strategy level.

Learning Event in Latin America

Barbara Böni presented plans for a Learning Event in October 2013 in the Latin America region. This event will reflect on earlier BA experiences in the PASOLAC (Central America) and ATICA (Bolivia) projects, explore the BA approach, and discuss possibilities to strengthen this kind of assessment in projects and programs supported by SDC in the region. The reason for organizing this regional event on BA is that the division has set itself the objective of conducting one BA per year per country. This will allow to cover the 3 domains of Cooperation Strategies during the life span of each CS and thus to use these BA as an element of monitoring.

Group work on BA

The afternoon of Day 1 was spent mostly in three smaller groups, focused on the following topics:

- Latin America Learning Event: what should be adapted or added as a result of the morning's discussions?
- Swiss Water & Sanitation NGO Consortium: how should the consortium integrate BAs into its planning and eventual proposal for a second phase?
- Institutionalization: How can SDC, HSI and others strengthen the institutionalization of BA approaches in their respective organizations?

Results of the group work were discussed in plenary and have been used – together with general feedback from a closing session – in a workshop with a smaller team the second day.

Annex: Methodological aspects of the Nepal and Ethiopia BAs

The presentation outlined the steps of the BA exercise, which are:

1. **Creation of concept note** (project leads, facilitators, backstoppers)
2. **Facilitator and Citizen Observer (CO) training workshop**
 - a. Creation of BA assessment framework & tools
 - b. Design of field testing and BA implementation
3. **Conducting of BA**
4. **Analysis of BA**
5. **Validation workshop** (representatives of key stakeholders)
6. **Finalization of BA report**

The BA exercises from Nepal (on steps 1-5) and Ethiopia (on steps 1-2) led to the following observations:

Planning process: there probably will often be a variety of BA organizers (e.g. backstoppers, facilitators, COs, project staff and local partners [providing logistical and contextual support, but not involved in conducting the BA]), which makes it very important to communicate clearly about goals, rationale and process, and to keep the core planning team small to make it manageable.

CO group composition: the importance of gender balance and of a balance between COs who are able to read and write in the local language and those who are not (to balance the interests of representativeness vs. ability to generate results that are readily analyzed) were stressed. The selection criteria need to be created for each context. For example, in Nepal, due to ethnic/caste differentiation, it was also necessary to achieve a balance of COs from marginalized and non-marginalized groups.

Length of training: *although training of COs appeared to be adequate for the purposes of the BA, there was a feeling that building in a follow-up refresher (of one half to a full day) before the BA field work would be beneficial to help COs further internalize the process.*

Driver(s) of BA: There is a tension between framing the BA based on the project (usually through an examination of the project document, and in particular the log frame) and promoting a more CO-driven BA with a view to gaining a more genuine local perspective on outcomes and impact. This can be reduced by ensuring a process of co-development of the BA assessment framework (which forms the basis for specific questions to be asked at household and other levels).

A second concern in terms of drivers is the use of materials from previous BA exercises to inform current ones. Obviously it makes sense to build on experience, but it is also important to ensure that the specific context is the main point of departure for the different BA steps.

Training methods: The use of role-playing exercises has proven to be quite useful in helping COs get a better feel for their role. There is a cumulative learning aspect, going from a workshop-based role

play, to a field testing (where COs have a chance to speak with people in a community that will not be part of the actual BA itself), to the 'live' implementation of the BA exercise. It can also be good to take photographs and short videos of COs in the role play and field test situations, which can then be used in debriefing and discussions about most useful ways of conducting discussions at different levels.

Whose learning?: One important element of the overall BA process is who is meant to learn from it. From recent experiences, it is clear that many different stakeholders can and do learn from the different steps in the BA, including not only COs, but community leaders, project staff, project partners, facilitators and backstoppers, and hopefully community members themselves (though this would need to be further investigated). The crucial point here is that devoting some thought to this aspect can help the design of different steps, in order to maximize learning.

Implications for BA principles

The Nepal and Ethiopia BA exercises also provided an opportunity for reflection on the BA principles as outlined in the [How-to Note](#) on Beneficiary Assessment. The following is by no means exhaustive, but rather indicative:

Participation & ownership: As mentioned, maximizing co-development of the BA (especially the assessment framework) is a key element of upholding this principle.

Inclusion: It is important to have a clear understanding of social groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity) in each context, and to use this understanding to inform both CO selection and elaboration of the assessment framework.

Representativeness: The use of stratified random sampling (ie. selection by type of site, 'old' vs. 'new' scheme, exclusion of service providers) seems to contribute well to minimizing bias at the same time as maximizing representativeness.

Differentiation: This can be supported through the composition of Focus/Discussion groups based on social categories, and through the differentiation of questions (e.g. relating to water-fetching for women, herding for men)

Self-critical quality of analysis: Some aspects of this include: sensitizing COs to power dynamics in household and group contexts, engagement of COs in analysis of results, careful consideration of project staff and local community leader feedback in the validation workshop.

Responsiveness: It is crucial to plan and follow up on this principle. In the Nepal case, the WARM-P project incorporated early results into planning of a new phase of the project as the BA coincided with this planning exercise. Other elements which have not yet been taken up in the two BAs include: response from the donor, reflection back to the communities about how the BA has contributed to modifications in the current and other projects/programs (if applicable).