How to! Encourage business partners to collect and share data for intervention monitoring

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Market development programmes rely heavily on business partners to gather data for establishing changes in the market systems as a result of the facilitation activities of the partnership. Data is necessary for tracking:

- Activity outputs
- Indication of market system change
- Market performance indices with a view to improving and increasing responsiveness to market dynamics

The data could be in the form of sales data, activity reports, business practices and other end-market information such as how customers are responding to products and their peculiar challenges dealing with the product/services which a development partner wants them to uptake.

Besides the rigorous measurement systems prescribed by The Donor Committee for Enterprise development (DCED), clients/funders often have additional information requirements and in most cases, the additional information needs of the programmes are not typically collected by businesses. The additional data collection burden may result in partners being unresponsive, and development programmes are faced with the challenge of limited data for effective tracking and reporting. The collapse in flow of data from business partners to development programmes can be linked to the following reasons:

- **Capacity of business partner/company to take the responsibility is rarely considered when designing monitoring tools and framework.** Depending on the size of the business partner or a partnering company, there may be a team dedicated to collecting market information. For instance, large companies are likely to have a dedicated unit responsible for collecting and analysing market data for decision making whereas smaller companies which form the bulk of the companies willing to try out market innovation activities may lack the technological and human resource to run such a unit. In view of resource availability, adapting the data collection framework to guide the amount of data collected is necessary else it will simply fail. In some cases, development programmes induce these small businesses to take up more than they can handle, and the enormity of data collection and reporting becomes an extra burden.

- **Failure to see the link between data collected and Company's bottom line.** On the one hand, Companies tend to collect data which they know adds value to their businesses, and on the other hand, development programmes may be oblivious of this reality. In certain instances, business partners do not understand the value of gathering any more information than they need to, and on the part of programmes, they have failed to share the value of data requested and how these information adds value to businesses. Failing to show the connection often results in poor reporting to programmes on the part of the business partner.

- Companies shy away from reporting because it is perceived to be an assessment of their performance and therefore seen as failure when the numbers are not looking good.

- **Initiating a parallel collection system different from the business's regular data collection channel.** Usually partnership negotiations are between the programme teams and the representatives of the Company, sometimes solely with the senior management. In such cases, the person(s) responsible for data collection in the Company may not be involved in deciding on the level of the information to be collected. In fact, the data collector may never sight the contract or implementation plan, hence, the lead implementer within the company takes up the responsibility of delivering all the required data and will consent to some granular details that he/she may have no knowledge of what to collect and the time required to collect them.

- **Presence of a one way data feeding system** where only the private sector partner is held to a requirement to provide data while the development partner does not provide feedback on the outcome of the data processing or other dual-way reporting system which might encourage the private sector to part with data

These factors create an inertia on the part of the business partners in responding to data collection and reporting requests while on the part of the programme, they are then faced with the challenge of intervention monitoring. It is thus necessary to develop a system of data collection and information sharing that is simple and of business value to both parties (Company and the programmes).

How to ensure data collection is low burden and driven by business incentives for data collection

Propcom Mai-karfi (PM) has identified four pillars for making data collection easy and to encourage partners to collect and report data:

1. **Rationalisation:** Answering the question of 'what data will satisfy our need to track?' can serve as a guide for determining how robust the data collection and reporting needed from partners will be. This may help in reducing the blind adoption of standard data requirements, and creates a flexible system to suit the capacity of the partner.

2. **Feasibility based on the size of the business partner:** Considering the size of the business can help to further streamline the level of data collection and reporting required. The choice of reporting method can be amended to suit the availability of partner resources. For instance, in a situation where a partner has a staff member supervising two states where some of these activities will be implemented, it may be impossible to have an activity report containing the contact details of the people present at a market storm (promotion event); in such a case, a qualitative report with supporting picture evidence will be one of the best means of reporting. More qualitative data and less quantitative is recommended, with focus on the output of the activities. Frequency of reporting may also lighten or reduce the burden.

3. **Alignment.** This consists of several elements:
   a) Engendering the understanding that data collection and reporting is simply for learning and improving performance in a responsive way rather than a means of determining punitive measures for poor performance.
   b) Working with partners to jointly design and agree on monitoring tools: this

also fosters a shared understanding of the extent of data required for performance management that has utility for both parties.
c) The responsibilities of data collecting and reporting should be situated with the individual or department responsible for routine data collection and reporting within the Company. Individuals responsible for routine data collection or management in the company should be part of the project design. That way, his/her input will guide the understanding of what the company already does, identify new information gathering opportunities while the programme can provide the clarity and capacity building where gaps exists for demonstrating the value of additional information gathering.

4. **Demonstrating value of the data to business growth:** Demonstrating in a collaborative way how data collected adds value to the business' bottom line may help a company to appreciate the value of collecting requested data. This is often easier to achieve where there is trust established in the relationship. You want to build trust because even when partners finally understand the value of the information, you want to avoid data hoarding as they (partners) may fear you might share their information with the competition.

   No doubt the data collection requirements, especially the frequency of data collection and reporting, determines the level of responsiveness received from the partner. At PM, after rationalising, establishing value, filtering based on size of company and aligning, the irreducible amount of data that satisfy our needs is categorised such that routine data gathering is efficient and partners are happy to collect the data. For periodic information, both parties then agree on what type of ongoing surveys to buy into, making it cost effective.

An example with Agriproject Concept International (ACI)

PM is partnering with ACI to promote rural access to thermo-tolerant NDV-i2 vaccine for controlling Newcastle disease in rural poultry. PM relies on ACI's routine inventory management tool for gathering data on sales, which eliminates delay and additional information gathering at that level. The inventory manager at ACI is involved in the direct reporting of sales as he takes delivery of products and maintains the record for product dispatch and delivery to customers and hence readily provides the information.

How did we encourage activity tracking?

At inception, PM demonstrated to ACI how tracking planned activities will help to determine sales conversion rate. PM avoided introducing any sophisticated method of doing this analysis. The partner used their rudimentary way of comparing costs to the ratio of new business activated and the amount of benefit expected and based on their judgement they reached a conclusion that the returns were too low compared to the investment – the cost of delivery (trainings and campaigns) was too high, the current operations was not profitable. This led to a revision of the business model. The flexibility of being able to learn and discover things allowed the partner to provide these information effortlessly and it was never perceived as a burden imposed by the programme. Furthermore the partner found value in tracking their promotional cost for planning future campaigns.

How market expanse/capacity was tracked

Two levels of market changes are tracked on the intervention – growth in community vaccinators' network and the expansion of distributors, and PM relies on ACI to supply the data. From the routine inventory data, PM was able to point ACI to the fact that certain states were doing better in their distributorship business compared to others. The company had never considered an inventory management system as a tool for determining where to focus growth efforts and this built their confidence in daring to obtain more information from the data they were already gathering.

Another interesting discovery from the distributors' performance was that the assumption that the distributors will grow the community vaccinators' network was flawed, the number of vaccinators were not increasing and vaccine flow was limited. Having established the trust with ACI that every data collected has an impact on their bottom-line, they readily went out to understand why distributors were not reporting increasing number of vaccinators. PM and ACI went to the field together to carry out the assessment. It was discovered that distributors in Nigeria do not go out of their ways to look for customers, rather they expect product owners to promote and direct traffic to their outlets. In view of this, both parties came together and designed another efficient means for ACI to recruit community vaccinators, and subsequently direct the vaccinators to distributors' outlets resupply. In less than two years, this approach has resulted in over 200% expansion in the Community Vaccinators' network. This is one way of showing that information gathering and reporting is for business growth and for improving performance. At the vaccinator level, ACI deployed a simple tool that the vaccinator keeps as business records. It tracks:

- The Households vaccinated per time
- Quantity of doses/vials of vaccine used for households vaccinated
- Dates of business transaction

ACI was able to demonstrate how this record allows the vaccinator to track costs, vaccine wastage and profits, including when to return to old customers for repeat vaccination. Based on the value of the information, vaccinators willingly keep this record and on a periodic basis, the information was collected and reported.

Collecting this data allows ACI to track rural market penetration and the reduced frequency of reporting lightens the burden for ACI.

Going forward, programmes should focus on demanding for that irreducible amount of information required to tell the story, and consider the capacity (size, resources) of the business partner in determining the volume and frequency of reporting. To lighten the burden of data collection means aligning the sources of data with existing ones of the business and involving the department/individual responsible for data collection in the decisions and design of data collection process. Keeping it simple, building trust and demonstrating the value of the information to partner's bottom line often creates the incentive for businesses to report as expected.

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