

**Decentralized M&E:  
A Review of the DISCAP Experience in Northern  
Ghana**

Prepared for  
CIDA and MLGRD

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## ***Introduction***

With the GoGs commitment to decentralization resulting in increased revenue flows to Districts, and the GPRS emphasis on bottom up planning, decentralized M&E has become a more integral component of poverty reduction programming. Several government stakeholders and development partners have demonstrated a commitment to supporting decentralized M&E. The District Capacity Building Project (DISCAP)<sup>1</sup> has been working with RPCUs in the 3 Northern Regions to develop a decentralized M&E system that builds upon NDPC guidelines. This process has involved not only the development of a system, but also the development of tools to enhance the Districts capacity to carry out M&E. It is a holistic system that involves DAs, MDAs, and communities in exploring the impact of poverty reduction programmes.

This short paper will outline the process that DISCAP engaged in to develop the system, and briefly discuss the 3 components of the system. It will then share the experiences of 3 Districts who were involved in a pilot exercise. Finally, recommendations will be presented which will hopefully inform the policy planning process at the National level.

## ***Development Process of Decentralized M&E System***

DISCAP's first intervention in M&E was to organize a workshop for Regional stakeholders to train them on M&E processes and to develop priorities for a M&E system to be designed to monitor poverty reduction programmes in the North. An officer from NDPC co-facilitated the workshop with Dr. Sulley Gariba, a leading African M&E specialist and NDPC commissioner (and DISCAP Institutional Development Specialist). A second workshop was held with representatives from 3 Districts in Northern Ghana. The workshop aimed to build the capacity of District officers to execute M&E exercises with the first step being to create understanding amongst officers of the M&E process generally with the intention to create demand for M&E data.

Following these two workshops DISCAP and the RPCUs decided there was a need to establish an M&E system that Districts could follow in reporting to the National level. Due to the low level of capacity to implement M&E at the District level, it was decided that it was necessary to develop an operational manual and training program that would guide the Districts in the M&E exercise.

At approximately the same time as the second workshop NDPC released its draft guidelines for District Based M&E. These guidelines emphasized core indicators that Districts should report on to feed into the GPRS monitoring process and outlined the components of the District M&E Report. In addition, the guidelines called for the establishment of Regional and District Poverty Monitoring Groups (PMGs) who

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<sup>1</sup> DISCAP is a 5-year bilateral joint initiative between Ghana and Canada. The goal of the project is improved government programming in the 3 Northern Regions and maintenance of most water and sanitation systems using local resources. DISCAP operates in all 24 Districts in Northern Ghana and works closely with RPCUs who coordinate project activities.

would be responsible for carrying out the M&E exercise. DISCAP would utilize these guidelines as the basis of the data collection exercise in the Districts, ensuring that this system developed in the North was compatible with National requirements.

### ***Decentralized M&E Stepwise Manual***

In December 2003 DISCAP produced the first draft of the Decentralized M&E Stepwise Manual. This Manual was designed to guide Districts and Regions through the M&E process with clear instructions of what is involved in the process. The system incorporates 3 components:

- ***Status of Poverty*** – This component will measure the progress of Districts on 20 core indicators that have been identified as the primary indicators to measure achievements related to the GPRS. Implemented primarily by the Districts this component will give a snapshot of these indicators on an annual basis, and over time provide a record of achievement for each District. It will also identify those key issues that are affecting a District and allow for specific programming to be undertaken that will address the gaps.
- ***Regional Harmonization of District Status of Poverty Reports and Assessment of District Development Management Capacity*** – This component provides guidelines for the Region to collate, harmonize and present the District Status of Poverty Reports to NDPC. Regions will also engage in an assessment of District Development Management Capacity. This assessment will look at different components of the DA to determine what performance gaps, if any, exist. Over time, the Region will be able to utilize this information to guide interventions and harmonize capacity building efforts.
- ***Community Assessment of Poverty*** – The GoG, specifically the GPRS, has expressed its commitment to engaging citizens, particularly the poor, in discussions and planning around poverty reduction programmes. Giving a “voice” to the citizens of the country is a critical step in development planning, yet it is one that requires concerted effort and organization. The community assessment of poverty will engage citizens and communities in a discussion on poverty utilizing the Community Score Card approach.

The Manual also includes a section on Gender Issues in M&E that encourages the collection of sex disaggregated data, and use of gender sensitive indicators. Copies of the Manual have been circulated to MLGRD, NDPC, MOWAC and development partner stakeholders and is also available on the DISCAP website at [www.discap.org](http://www.discap.org).

Several review meetings were held with Regional and District stakeholders to ensure the relevance and user friendliness of the Manual. Once this review process was completed DISCAP and the RPCUs engaged in a pilot exercise in May 2004 as a final review activity in advance of expansion to all 24 Districts in the North.

### ***Decentralized M&E Pilot***

The pilot exercise included the creation of RPMGs and DPMGs (in the 3 pilot Districts: Savelugu Nanton, NR; Bawku West, UER; Wa Municipal Assembly, UWR) as recommended by NDPC. Two short training courses were held for members of the PMGs. The Regional course focused on data analysis, compilation of a Regional Report and skills to carry out a performance assessment of District Development Management Capacity. The District course focused on data collection, analysis and presentation. The Districts were taken through all the steps in the Manual as well as gender issues in M&E.

Following the training the Districts developed action plans for the implementation of the M&E exercise to be supported by DISCAP and completed by July 15, 2004. The RPMGs, particularly staff of the RPCUs provided technical support to the Districts throughout the pilot exercise. A Review of the Data Collection and Analysis process was held in late July 2004.

As the Status of Poverty portion of the M&E exercise was completed DISCAP and the RPCUs engaged the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND) to coordinate a community assessment in each of the 3 pilot Districts. The NGND had just completed a community scorecard (CSC) exercise in two Districts in the North and had the required experience to coordinate the Decentralized exercise.

NGND sub-contracted and trained 3 local NGOs to carry out the CSC. The theme of the CSC was water and sanitation. This participatory M&E exercise is currently ending completion with 1 public forum in Bawku West remaining. Results from this exercise will be reported by NGND and included in the Regional summaries.

The performance assessment of District Development Management Capacity is scheduled for the next quarter.

### ***Major Findings from the Pilot Exercise***

- There is a need for capacity building in M&E if Districts are going to be able to effectively collect, manage, analyze and report on data. The most significant capacity gaps are in data management and analysis. Data are being collected by the MDAs, but the storage and recording systems are inadequate. In order for the data, and therefore the entire M&E exercise to be useful for Districts it is necessary for them to learn to analyze the data. It is not enough to report on raw data, the DPMG needs to understand the implications of the trends and be able to incorporate this analysis into planning processes. Intensive courses with on site coaching sessions will contribute to the effective implementation of M&E.
- All capacity building efforts should target the core members of the DPCU as well as staff of MDAs. One of the major challenges faced by the Districts was to obtain the data from the MDAs. Relationship building between the two should be encouraged, as well as the development of mechanisms for collaboration. The

MDAs should be involved in both planning and M&E processes in order to have effective collaboration.

- There are a wide variety of stakeholders active in this field. More efforts at collaboration need to be made in order to avoid duplication. This includes collaboration between MLGRD, MDAs, and development partners. Some synergies are being experienced in the Northern Regions as UNICEF has worked with NDPC to support a Regional Review process which is currently being implemented. This process involves Districts collecting and reporting on data related to the core indicators established by NDPC and is very similar to the DISCAP proposed process. DISCAP has had preliminary discussions regarding potential areas of liaison with UNICEF and JICA in the UER and UNICEF in the UWR and NR.
- Community assessments are a valuable way of engaging communities in dialogue and ensuring their views are incorporated into development planning and service provision. However, as these assessments become more common it will be necessary to have some coordination so that communities are not overburdened. In addition, a mechanism should be developed to follow up with participating communities to demonstrate how the information collected is being used.

### ***Conclusion***

DISCAP's experience in Decentralized M&E has been a very exciting one as the potential for the effective use of the information and strong links between communities and DAs emerged. However, it is one that is being approached with caution as there is a need for a significant amount of capacity building to be carried out at the District level.

In addition, there is a need for increased collaboration in this area in order to avoid duplication and waste of effort. Therefore, DISCAP is interested in further engaging with discussions of other stakeholders, to share the Northern experience, as well as to work together to establish a system, and build the capacity of Districts to implement that system.