Summary Notes: Youth Talanoa to discuss Storytelling for Tracking Change

Held on Thursday 4th August 2022 at the Greenhouse Co-Working Studios

On the evening of 4th August 2022, a small group of (25) people from within the aid development community in Fiji to come together to 'tok' about "Storytelling, M&E and Young Peoples Voice". The group was comprised of Youth or 'near' youth professionals who work in development programs and projects and are in interested in monitoring and evaluation, research, data and storytelling.

The reason for the convening came from a recognition that the field of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) remains a very closed and niche area that is driven by external (western) and often donor led interests for programs and projects. The views that are depicted in these 'M&E' reports are those of external authors and reporters who often neglect the local voices and stories from local people. Over the last few years, there is an increasing push to increase and improve locally owned and led M&E processes as well as highlighting the current status quo M&E processes as being colonialist and disempowering. As such the key points below are the views young people and pacific M&E professionals who came together to discuss **3 questions** on youth perspectives of M&E and storytelling, and what is helping or stopping them in this field.

How are young people telling stories of change or impact today? (RESPONSES)

- FWRM have utilised creative techniques to capture stories with girls in their M&E
    - These include written stories, songs, dance, etc.
- There is a need to identify what is the voice of youth in local contexts
    - Who is/isn't included as youth? Who is representative of youth? How is diversity captured?
- Space needs to be created for emerging M&E professionals to discuss scope for involvement in M&E contexts at the local, national, regional and global levels
- M&E involving young people needs to create a safe space for their participation, whether as M&E professionals or as informants
    - Tokenistic engagement is not real engagement
- Creating safe spaces for young people is difficult
    - This is doubly so for girls and women, and doubly so again for those with disabilities or other characteristics that may lead to their marginalisation
- Young people are vital to community functioning – such as planting crops – but their voice is minimised
- Save the Children's Kidslink program offers an example of an intentional space for youth participation in decision-making and skills development
- All M&E should be documented

What is helping or stopping them from doing this more or better? (RESPONSES)

- Pacific M&E should engage local epistemologies and ontologies
- M&E should always begin by questioning who is being targeted for the collection and communication of data
    - Collecting information at an office level requires a certain form of language and approach
    - Collection at village level requires more time, sitting and observing. And space should be created to allow young people to facilitate
    - With attentive observation, required information will present itself in a way that may not be accurately captured in rigid data collection models

- o Creative expression can help young people to collect and share stories, such as through song, dance and social media. Sometimes good data is collected through not necessarily focusing on capturing information for and M&E audience
  - o M&E professionals need to "adapt our listening to the ways that stories are being told"
- Social media opens new avenues for youth expression and sharing stories, although the value of the information shared may not always be appreciated
  - o Young people express themselves through songs, poetry, dance and in demonstrations of relationality
  - o Different information is conveyed differently across and within platforms, such as the more polished information shared in posts as opposed to more raw expression in stories
- Different forms of expression across and amongst generations, as well as the imposition of foreign M&E methods provokes the question of 'what knowledge and stories are valued?'
  - o This question can be asked locally and internationally
- "To what level are young people valued for the work that they do?"
- Perceptions are strong amongst older generations that young people don't have capacity – they are only there to learn

Are there local ways of knowing or assessing included in this story telling process? (RESPONSES)
- Building trust is vital with communities to get good quality data
- Talanoa is a good method but it can be used differently in different settings – e.g. formal and informal talanoa
  - o Having a tanoa helps facilitate discussion
- Creating an environment for people to feel comfortable telling their stories is a skill and a challenge
- Need to be wary of power dynamics within groups when getting stories
  - o Moderate, protect and create safe space
- Need to dismantle predetermined expectations, have an open mind and allow communities to tell the stories *that are important to them*
  - o "everything they say is valuable, it's just how much work are we willing to put in"

Open discussion
- "Patience actually builds trust"
  - o Be open minded in engagement and data collection
- Can be challenging to do best practice against donor/management expectations
  - o Need to fight top-down notions of 'we just want this'
  - o Need to build trust and confidence to reflect back mistakes and best practice
- "[In] M&E a big component is learning, so there will be mistakes"
  - o Revision is necessary
  - o Need to document (for) the need to advocate for a change in direction and/or method
- "Sometimes in the Pacific we can be afraid to push back"
  - o There is a need for safe guidance and mentorship
- Query: Could this network connect emerging evaluators and mentors?
- Asking youth to share stories allows for capturing unintended consequences
  - o Good and bad
  - o A good example is the Youth@Work photovoice initiative of 2015

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- Working to a predetermined final product corrupts the process and the data
- M&E in the Pacific can learn from and be based in Pacific values of trust, patience and respect
- "Self-stigma" of being a young person entering a space knowing that you're a young person can limit the full capacity of emerging evaluators (NB: self-stigma is terminology from the HIV space)
  - o Need to remember, "You are valuable"
- Pacific M&E needs to follow cultural protocols in requesting access and building relationships
- There is a need to respect and thank those who have given their stories by bringing them back to them
  - o This can include through alternative platforms of sharing stories
  - o [something about SPC and the Pacific Way]
- In capturing data, value must first be placed on listening
- There is difficulty, uncertainty and anxiety in transitioning out of the youth space, which requires both mentoring and also the intentional vacating of space below to allow new young people to enter and above to allow established youth to progress

Future Thoughts and Next Steps

The group requested that this informal space be continued but also an online network be setup to link them together. The below is also an offering of key networks and projects that are currently happening.

Networks

- Pacific Monitoring and Evaluation Group (LinkedIn) https://www.linkedin.com/groups/5126370/ Contact: Allan Mua allan.mua@gmail.com
- EvalYouth Pacific (*Launched 11 August 2022*) - https://www.facebook.com/EvalYouth-Pacific-288756139604487/ Contact: Sakeo Moce moce@unfpa.org
- Fiji Monitoring and Evaluation Society (*Launched 9 August 2022*) – Contact: qasenivalu@unfpa.org
- Localisation of Pacific Climate Consulting – Contact Marita Manley marita@talanoa-consulting-fiji.com

MEL Projects

- SPC MEL Va'a Project and Rebbilib Contact: Kaita Sem kaitas@spc.int

Research

- Youth project: This project looks at the opportunities and barriers youth face to develop their potential as leaders and active citizens. Examining case studies of young leaders in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu, it aims to assist young people to identify pathways to their own development, as well as guide policymakers and practitioners to establish and strengthen initiatives aimed at such development. Contact: Aidan Craney A.Craney@latrobe.edu.au

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