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# Towards Laying a Foundation for Christ-Centered Monitoring & Evaluation

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This paper challenges Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) or Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)<sup>1</sup> practitioners in Christ-centered organizations (CCOs) to critically reflect on their organizational framework for M&E/MEAL. Throughout this paper, the authors encourage M&E practitioners in CCOs to consider and reflect upon six proposed foundational layers the authors identify in an effort to make the case for a new kind of “Christ-centered M&E” in CCOs: 1) the M&E profession, 2) the kingdom of God, 3), the Christ-centered organization; 4) M&E within CCOs; 5) Christ-centered M&E and the wider M&E profession; and 6) a proposed framework for Christ-centered M&E. A M&E/MEAL approach helps organizations improve operational decision-making and allows adjustments, course-corrections, and the ability to refine program implementation. A Christ-Centered M&E/MEAL approach includes the opportunity to listen to what God is doing to build his kingdom in the communities where CCOs work. When the M&E/MEAL team in a CCO seizes this opportunity to “listen,” they can come to better love God, self, neighbor, and creation in deeper and more meaningful ways. Through deepening this relationship, they can bring stakeholders along this journey with them, ultimately furthering the kingdom of God here on earth through Christ-centered M&E/MEAL.

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## Introduction

We argue that a Christ-centered M&E/MEAL approach helps improve operational decision-making and allows adjustments, course-corrections, and the ability to refine program implementation for Christ-centered organizations (CCO). It also means Christian M&E practitioners, through the collection, analysis, and use of data, can listen to what God is doing to build his kingdom. When the M&E/MEAL team in a CCO seize this opportunity to “listen,” they can come to better love God, self, neighbor, and creation in deep and meaningful ways. Through deepening this commitment to Christ-centered M&E/MEAL, they can bring stakeholders along on this journey, and ultimately further the kingdom of God here on earth.

To make a case for a working framework for Christ-centered M&E, we argue the Christ-centered M&E practitioner must consider and understand six foundational layers:

- Layer 1: The M&E Profession
- Layer 2: The Kingdom of God
- Layer 3: The Christ-centered organization

- Layer 4: M&E in Christ-centered organizations
- Layer 5: Christ-centered M&E within the wider M&E landscape
- Layer 6: A Framework for Christ-centered M&E

## Layer 1: The M&E Profession

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), or Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL), is a process that helps improve performance and achieve results. Monitoring is the collection and analysis of data to learn whether an organization is doing what it says it is doing and doing it efficiently. Monitoring data helps to identify faults in program implementation, when X activity did not produce an intended output. Evaluation is the validation of an organization’s “theory of change” and asks the question of whether the program brought about the change it intended. It is ultimately an assessment of whether the intervention is based on good ideas and actually works. Monitoring and evaluation form the basis for modifying programs and assessing the quality of activities being conducted. It is an essential process in helping managers, planners, implementers, policy makers, and donors acquire the

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<sup>1</sup> M&E and MEAL will be used throughout the paper to represent the range of approaches and considerations for inclusion of monitoring, evaluation, learning, research, and accountability to stakeholders etc. that organizations use to measure their programs and respond accordingly.

information and understanding they need to make informed decisions about program operations. Monitoring and evaluation help to reinforce the mission and vision of the organization and provide the necessary data to guide strategic planning, to design and implement programs and projects, and to allocate and reallocate resources in better, more effective, ways.

## Layer 2: The Kingdom of God

It is important to recognize that the M&E profession assumes that organization, whether from public, private, or civil society sectors, are embedded in wider environments, and can influence or even cause change in individuals and communities through their programs and/or interventions. For followers of Christ, however, there is a different foundational understanding of what truly causes such changes. For Christians, it is Christ who brings about good and lasting fruit in the world, for, apart from him, the house is built in vain (John 15:5, Psalm 127:1). While followers of Christ can utilize the best professional methods to identify causation in programs, the foundation still arises from faith and from abiding in Christ, who is actively at work in the world. This faith includes a recognition that there is a Trinitarian center to the universe, an unshakable reality and Person that is both the beginning and end of all things (Revelation 22:13). Jesus used the language of accessing and living in “the kingdom of God” as a way to describe what it means to build on this true foundation. Kenneth Bailey (2008) defines the kingdom of God as “the rule of God in the lives of individuals and societies.” What does the rule of God look like? Jesus modeled it to look like sacrificial love, forgiveness, and liberation for all things to be as they were meant to be – full of abundant life. As Christian development theorists Bryant Myers, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert argue, the kingdom of God is about the restoration of the four key relationships: the self with God, the self with others, the self with the self, and the self with creation (Myers 1999, 2011; Corbett and Fikkert 2009).<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Bryant Myers, E. Stanley Jones, a theologian and missionary in India, writes that “The kingdom is the Father’s, Jesus is the embodiment of God’s kingdom, and the Holy Spirit is the first fruit of God’s kingdom on earth...the one who helps us discover the truth and fullness of the kingdom”. Bryant Myers continues, “When it is at its best, the church is the sign, a witness, to the kingdom of God breaking into the world. God brings the kingdom; it is neither our task nor that of our [programs]” (Myers 1999, 48).

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<sup>2</sup> Myers (1999) argues that creation is also a relationship fundamental to human flourishing in the transformational paradigm.

<sup>3</sup> 78% of organizations that identified as Christian who participated in the “Christian ideas on development” survey in 2017 indicated that they believed faith integration with activities was very important (Offutt and Reynolds 2019, 5)

Therefore, Christ-centered M&E is built upon a different foundation, one that recognizes that it is God who brings his kingdom with positive and lasting change in broken lives and communities. That said, it is important to recognize that Christ-centered M&E cannot operate divorced from Christ-centered action, which flows from a Christ-centered organization as it seeks collectively to follow and abide in Christ. This is the topic of the next layer.

## Layer 3: The Christ-Centered Organization

According to the United Nations Population Fund, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) are “religious, faith-based, and/or faith-inspired groups, which operate as registered or unregistered non-profit institutions” (UNFPA 2009, 12). Christ-centered organizations fit within this broader definition but are distinct in a variety of ways. To differentiate CCOs, we propose the following operational definition:

*Christ-centered organizations prioritize the integration of Christian faith into an integral mission or transformational paradigm that seeks to partner with God as he establishes his kingdom on earth, where relationships with God, self, others, and creation are restored to flourishing at individual, familial, and systemic ecosystem levels.*

A 2017 survey of Christian NGOs that were, for the most part, members of the Accord Network, a convening body of Christian non-profits working in disaster relief and international development, revealed that “the transformational paradigm is the unrivaled framing of Christian development for NGO leaders participating in the survey.”<sup>3</sup> While missions movements from the past typically emphasized a dualistic understanding between evangelism and social programs, recent decades have seen the development of a more holistic understanding of the gospel, in which sharing the good news of God’s love is encouraged in both word and deed (Myers 2011, Stearns 2009). This holistic understanding is predominant among Accord Network organizations, so the definition for Christ-centered organizations offered here should resonate with most Accord members. A shared understanding of what sets Christ-centered organizations apart from other faith-based organizations is important for underlining the need for M&E within CCOs, and the unique contributions it can make to the M&E field at large.

#### Layer 4: M&E in Christ-Centered Organizations

Across the development community, the drive for better M&E is expanding, as exemplified by the 2019 Nobel Prize in economics being awarded to three scientists who apply rigorous methods to the study of impacts of poverty reduction programs - evidence that good, high quality research is being used to fight poverty far and wide (Ziady 2019). The same trend is happening in the Christian community seeking to hold CCOs more accountable for their development work. Donors, for example, are increasingly interested in program effectiveness (Goldseker and Moody 2017). According to some estimates, FBOs (which includes CCOs) utilize over \$8.5 billion annually of privately contributed funds (UNHCR 2016) on a global level. As Eve Smith points out, new generations of donors (Gen Xers and Millennials) demand more control of their charity than the boomer generation (Smith 2018).

Despite CCOs being increasingly held to account to demonstrate their effectiveness, a gap remains for many. In 2001, the first director of the White House Initiative for Faith-based and Community Initiatives, John Dilulio, identified a knowledge gap that many next-generation donors probably still struggle with today: He noted that the lack of impact evidence from CCOs makes it difficult to draw comparisons with their secular counterparts. Dilulio said “We do not really know whether these faith-based programs, or others like them, outperform their secular counterparts, how they compare to one another or whether, in any case, it is the ‘faith’ in faith-based, that mainly determines any observed difference” (Dilulio 2002)” Indeed, CCOs still struggle to provide the proper evidence that their programs do indeed work. In 2002, the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University conducted a systematic review of nearly 800 studies that documented the effectiveness of FBOs (Johnson et al. 2008). The study concluded that research on effectiveness of faith-based organizations has been largely neglected.

For CCOs to meet the challenges of measuring impact and closing the evidence gap around faith-based impact, systematic and effective methods of monitoring and evaluation are needed. These will also allow for learning and continuous improvement in the organization. The good news is that in recent years rigorous research within CCOs is increasing. One example is the research Bruce Wydick, an econometrician at University of San Francisco, conducted on [Compassion International](#), a Christ-

centered holistic child development and sponsorship organization (Wydick 2013). Wydick found that Compassion’s programs had large and statistically significant impacts on educational, employment, and leadership outcomes of children later in life.

Another recent example is the 2018 study carried out by [International Care Ministries](#) (ICM), a CCO in the Philippines that partners with [Innovations for Poverty Action](#) (IPA), a research and policy non-profit organization. The study sought to test the causal impacts of religiosity via a randomized evaluation of ICM’s Christian values and theology education program. The study found significant increases in religiosity and income due to the program intervention (Gharad 2018). In other words, the study not only isolated the impact of faith, but also both faith and the program together.

In addition to partnerships with large research consortiums or academic institutions, CCOs are carrying out investigations of their own on the effectiveness of their programs and approaches, and they are increasingly making their findings more available to the broader public. This is evidenced in the content shared at the recent meetings of the Accord Research Alliance, which for more than a decade has cultivated a learning community around best practices in Christ-centered monitoring, evaluation, and research.<sup>4</sup>

The growing demand for documenting effectiveness, learning, and impact is a challenge for all relief and development organizations, but CCOs are faced with an additional challenge. In addition to meeting the standards of scientific rigor, CCOs seek to capture the essence of the *transformative/integral mission paradigm*, or evidence of the kingdom of God. Facing and overcoming this larger challenge and achieving these goals calls for a radical shift in the CCO’s approach towards M&E. Before developing a Christ-centered framework for M&E on their own, CCOs should start by first recognizing that M&E is a professional field from which they have much to learn from and invest in it accordingly. Understanding how the values embedded in the wider sector of M&E compare with principles for Christ-centered relief and development is a first step to developing a Christ-centered framework for M&E.

#### Layer 5: Christ-Centered M&E within the Wider M&E Landscape

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) is one of the leading institutions guiding practitioners in the field of monitoring and evaluation. In 2018 the AEA issued updated Guiding Principles in an effort to

<sup>4</sup> See more information on the Accord Research Alliance. <https://www.accordnetwork.org/member-alliances>.

provide standards for the conduct of professional evaluators. These principles and standards are intended to provide common ground for sound practices in evaluation and are regarded as foundational for how professional evaluators should go about their work (American Evaluation Association 2018).<sup>5</sup>

A drive to develop standards of excellence also exists among networks of Christ-centered organizations. The [Accord Network](#) is a convening body of Christian non-profits working in disaster relief and international development for the purpose of learning, collaborating, and building Christ-centered unity around the shared vision of poverty elimination. To guide member organizations, the network has created eight “[Principles of Excellence in Integral Mission](#),” with which member organizations agree and uphold. Principle 7 elevates the

importance of M&E by stating: “we support local communities and churches in measuring all that matters.” While other principles do not directly relate to M&E as a system of thought or practice, they nevertheless apply to M&E as an integral part of any community engagement. Christian M&E professionals who seek to ascribe to sector-wide best practices (e.g. AEA), can also apply the principles that guide Christ-centered organizations that seek to alleviate poverty in Jesus’ name.

Table 1 below notes areas of overlap and joint application between AEA and the Accord Principles. Internal boxes describe how the principles of excellence in integral mission are applied to the AEA principles. Empty boxes indicate areas of no obvious overlap.

Joint Application of Accord and AEA Principles in Christ-centered M&E		American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles				
		A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct data-based inquiries that are thorough, methodical, and contextually relevant.	B. Competence: Evaluators provide skilled professional services to stakeholders.	C. Integrity: Evaluators behave with honesty and transparency in order to ensure the integrity of the evaluation.	D. Respect for People: Evaluators honor the dignity, well-being, and self-worth of individuals and acknowledge the influence of culture within and across groups.	E. Common Good and Equity: Evaluators strive to contribute to the common good and advancement of an equitable and just society.
Accord Network Principles of Excellence in Integral Mission	1. Our Christian faith is at the center of our identity, motive and manner of being.	Evaluators conduct quality data-based inquiries in a way that follows and honors God	Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to maintain core competencies and always be improving	Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to be transparent and honest throughout all levels of evaluation	Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to love and respect all people across different groups	Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to contribute to the common good and justice for all
	2. We acknowledge the reality and significance of the spiritual realm.				Evaluators respect the spiritual beliefs of all people while seeking to understand/document evidence of the kingdom of God	
	3. The church is central.			Evaluators are transparent with the church and all stakeholders	Evaluators respect and include the local church in M&E and help join the church in peacebuilding with wider culture	Evaluators respect and empower the church through participatory M&E to work for common good and an equitable and just society
	4. Transformational practices start with us.		Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to continue growing as professionals in order to better serve others	Evaluators are motivated by identity in Christ to model transformation in our work and interactions		
	5. We recognize the whole system of poverty.	Evaluators conduct quality data-based inquiries to understand the whole system of poverty				Evaluators recognize the whole system of poverty in their efforts to advance an equitable and just society.
	6. In our relationship journey with the church, our local partners, and the community, we enter as guests, co-labor as partners, and continue as friends.	Evaluators conduct quality data-based inquiries to best journey with local partners			Evaluators seek to respect and partner with people in ways that lead to self-worth and empowerment	Evaluators engage with all local parties towards the common good and justice for all
	7. We support local communities and churches in measuring all that matters.	Evaluators conduct quality data-based inquiries to measure all that matters with local partners	Evaluators are competent in every aspect of partnering with communities to measure what matters			Evaluators work with local partners to measure what matters towards the common good and justice for all
	8. We tell the story with integrity.			Evaluators seek to honor the dignity of all, publicize evidence in respectful ways, use data with integrity and consent of participants		

Table 1: Areas of overlap and joint applications between American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators and Accord Network Principles of Excellence in Integral Mission.

The integration of the principles of excellence in integral mission with the principles of excellence in the M&E profession provides a starting point for what it

means to do Christ-centered M&E. The next step is to explain what a Christ-centered approach to M&E entails.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/lid=51> for updated 2018 Guiding Principles.

## Layer 6: Towards a Framework for Christ-Centered M&E

There are many passages from the Bible that can inform thinking about monitoring and evaluation from a Christ-centered perspective. Two such passages come from the books of Romans and Colossians.

Do not *conform to the pattern of this world*, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

...so that they may have the *full riches of complete understanding*, in order that they may know the *mystery of God, namely, Christ*, in whom are *hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...* (Col. 2: 2-8)

In an effort to apply these principles in Scripture and building upon the previous foundational layers, we propose the following framework for Christ-centered monitoring and evaluation:

### A Proposed Framework for Christ-Centered Monitoring and Evaluation

Christ-centered monitoring and evaluation upholds principles and methods which:

1. Are standard practice from within the M&E profession and align with the kingdom of God;
2. Transcend and transform standard M&E principles and practices in the light of the kingdom of God; and
3. Promote documentation of evidence of the manifestation of the kingdom of God...
  - i. with the purpose of seeking the transformation of all stakeholders
  - ii. in a way that leads to knowing and loving God, self, neighbor, and creation (Luke 10:27 and Myers 2011).

The question to ponder is not only what development gains or outcomes the CCO has achieved in the local community, but also what God is *already doing* in that community. Christ-centered M&E is a process of knowing and discerning God personally and through program data, with the purpose of following his love and leadership and, in the process, glorifying him. To try and discern what God is doing through program data involves a holistic range of inter-connected approaches and measures, including spiritual and/or religious measures (Joint Learning Initiative n.d.). A Christ-centered M&E framework should be guided by the “why”, “what”, and “how” of measurement in order to chart an evolutionary analytical process that

progressively delivers more evidence on the organization's contribution to the growth of the kingdom.

In his famous book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster, a Christian theologian and founder of Renovare advises that this kind of evolutionary analytical process should have an experimental component for continual learning:

*Let me suggest that we take an experiential attitude toward spiritual realities. Like any other scientific endeavor, we form a hypothesis and experiment with it to see if it is true or not. If our first experiment fails, we do not despair or label the whole business fraudulent. We re-examine our procedure, perhaps adjust our hypothesis, and try again. We should at least have the honesty to persevere in this work to the same degree we would in any field of science. The fact that so many are unwilling to do so betrays not their intelligence but their prejudice* (Foster 1998, 23)

An experimental attitude elevates the importance of a posture of learning for CCOs. Collectively following Christ as he meets both physical and spiritual needs in the world requires a listening-oriented and humble attitude. In a culture that overvalues “knowing” or “telling” others what to do, the challenge is to *listen* in order to ask the right questions and *learn* the way to better alternatives for flourishing (Schein 2013). In addition, listening and learning leads to mutual

#### Matthew 11:2-5

John the Baptizer hears about the works of Jesus and sends two of his disciples to ask him this question: “are you the One who was to come, or should we look for someone else?”

Jesus replies, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Me.”

transformation according to development practitioners and thinkers Quarles van Ufford and Giri (2003), who argue that “international development is an opportunity for learning, self-development and self-transformation, for the subject and object of development.”

Returning to Scripture, consider how the interaction between Jesus and John the Baptizer highlights how data collection and analysis can play a role in experiencing the signs of God's kingdom.

When Matthew tells this story, John is imprisoned by the regional kingdom of Herod, but he believes in the arrival of a new kind of king bringing a new kind of kingdom; a new kind of king who leads through love and service - not military power; a new kind of kingdom with forgiveness instead of violence as its driving force. John wants to know if Jesus is the “One who was to come,” or in other words, the new king. Rather than answering John’s question directly, Jesus mentions only the signs or *indicators* of what happens in a kingdom under His reign. These indicators revolve around the liberation of people and bringing new life, and point to the One ushering in this new reality in the midst of this world. The data and results tracked across the indicators, and the indicators themselves, tell us something about who God is, what he is like, what he is doing, how we can join him.

For Jesus, his qualitative testimony around these indicators is sufficient data to be collected by John’s disciples (or data collectors in our M&E framework) and shared with their stakeholder John the Baptizer. He says to John that he should be able to discern the presence of the new and true king by recognizing the data across the indicators of his kingdom unfolding in the midst of this world.

If Jesus were to say this in the language of the modern-day international development organization, it might have sounded something like this: “Please collect activity monitoring and outcome data on the following indicators (% of increased mobility for people with disabilities, etc.), then condense your findings in a report to share with your stakeholders and CEO.”

Jesus ends the exchange with a provocative statement that the manifestation of his kingdom will disrupt and threaten the status quo, especially of the regional and global kingdoms that put people like John in prison. The person who is not offended at this is truly blessed to witness and participate in the unfolding of God’s kingdom.

This exchange between Jesus and John has much to teach us about how Christ-centered relief and development organizations are different from secular international development organizations. What differentiates CCOs is that they seek to join the king as he advances his kingdom, rather than trying by human efforts alone to serve and empower others. Therefore, it is essential that Christ-centered organizations be able to discern the presence and leadership of the king and to abide in him. One way to discern the presence and leadership of the king is through data, like Jesus shared with the disciples of John. Jesus appears to be communicating that data across life-affirming and liberating indicators can help the church and Christ-centered organizations discern the manifestation of the kingdom.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that it is difficult to discern the kingdom of God or the presence of the king. It is difficult to accurately collect or analyze the data, fruits, or results around life-affirming and liberating indicators even with the best methods, instruments, and spiritual discernment. There is a strong possibility of getting it wrong. To complicate matters further, a lack of evidence or results does not necessarily mean that God’s kingdom is not advancing. As Michael Woolcock, Lead Social Scientist for the World Bank asked at the 2019 Accord Research Alliance (ARA) intensive workshop: “Are we in the sunflower seed business or the oak tree business? After six months it would appear the sunflower is more successful according to the metric of height. However, return thirty years later and the evaluation would look very different” (Woolcock 2019). While it is important to seek to discern evidence of the kingdom of God in the journey to follow Christ to serve those who are vulnerable, there may be times when it is important to simply be faithful to kingdom values and practices in the midst of a lack of evidence of fruit at the present. In his same talk at the ARA 2019 intensive, Woolcock referenced the journey of Nelson Mandela: “If you evaluated the fruit of Nelson Mandela’s work and life in his twentieth year in prison, with apartheid alive and well, what would you have found? If you evaluated the fruit of his work and life ten years after that, when he was the president of a democratic South Africa, what would you have found?”

These stories encourage Christ-centered M&E practitioners to recognize that God doesn’t move within the typical project life cycle timeframe. To abide in Christ (John 15:5), to wait patiently, to pray, to engage Scripture, to learn continuously, and to seek faithfulness are necessary parts of the journey. In addition, it is important to remember God’s eternal perspective and that our attempts to understand and discern his movement and his reign are to be held with humility, to remember that we are not in the sunflower business.

It is in this posture of humility that the Bible should be engaged as part of Christ-centered M&E, because the Bible is the “only true and unbiased source of guidance to the goals and means of human transformation” (Myers 1999). As Myers points out, “the Bible speaks of human life in the context of cosmic history from creation to consummation.” In the Bible we find a storyteller, a father, who tells a story that encompasses our stories. It is a story of goodness, brokenness, and redemption, often existing simultaneously, with a cosmic arc towards reconciliation and justice; a story that witnesses to Jesus’ embodiment of the kingdom of God, through word, deed and sign; a story that witnesses the Holy Spirit always present to illuminate Scripture and to spark

transforming work of forgiveness and love in our lives; a story that reminds us of the importance of prayer, contemplation, and action in joining what God is doing in everyday life. Christ-centered M&E can play a role in telling that story for organizations and communities. “The biblical frame provides a coherent and consistent framework for creating meaning in and providing explanation about the world in which we live” in a way that “celebrates life and resists anti-life” (Myers 1999).

Even so, engagement with Scripture must not be done in isolation. It must be engaged as a Christ-centered organization with mutual ownership with individuals and communities being served. Scripture must be allowed to speak truth and grace to all—bringing opportunities for mutual transformation.

From Catholic Social Teaching (CST) comes a helpful guide on how to engage with Scripture together as organizations and communities within the realm of M&E. CST’s “Pastoral Circle” has four elements: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and action.

**Insertion:** Becoming part of the community and building relationships

**Social analysis:** Work the community does in analyzing and making sense out of its own reality

**Theological reflection:** The community is encouraged to think theologically about what it has learned about its situation and its social, political, and economic context.

**Action:** The community acts on its theology<sup>6</sup>

As M&E is a discipline of reflection, with the right foundation and perspective on the kingdom of God, with prayer and the Bible as companions for the journey, Christ-centered M&E can be a process of transformation for all stakeholders involved.

### **Example: Applying Christ-Centered M&E to Indicator Selection**

[Food for the Hungry](#) (FH) is an Accord Network member organization and Christ-centered organization (CCO) working in 20 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean since 1971 and responding to human suffering through a Christian approach to relief and development. For nearly five decades, FH has embraced several schools of thought that have shaped its theology and vocation to serve the most vulnerable people in the world (Food for the Hungry 2017, 4). In 2011, FH launched “Child Focused Community Transformation” (CFCT) as its

primary programmatic model. The goal of the CFCT model is to enable the world’s most vulnerable children and communities to thrive through a transformational process intended to end all forms of human poverty (Food for the Hungry 2017, 9). As part of the CFCT rollout process in 2013, FH’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team helped define transformation and clarified goals, articulated desired results, and developed frameworks for monitoring progress. To accomplish this, the team needed to identify a holistic set of indicators. To prioritize indicators effectively, the team first investigated indicators that were widely used in the international development and M&E professional community. One indicator considered to monitor program implementation was intimate partner violence.

The FH M&E team understood that indicators like these have been developed by large multilateral agencies or survey firms and had been scientifically proven to be effective in collecting, analyzing, and using information cross-culturally. The indicator in question seeks to capture the attitudes of both men and women around what circumstances justify beating a woman. FH acknowledged that information provided by this indicator could help inform norm-shifting behavior change interventions to ensure that women are protected from domestic violence, a change they were interested in measuring.

The FH M&E team sought to discern whether intimate partner violence was a quality measure and whether it aligned with the kingdom of God. Since it takes significant time and resources to develop these indicators and measures, FH agreed it would be good stewardship in this case to not develop its own indicator lest it be in danger of “re-inventing the wheel.” The team reflected on their beliefs that women being beaten within families violates the Biblical truth of image bearing and Jesus’ teachings to love one’s neighbor as oneself, and thus concluded that the measure is in alignment with the kingdom of God and aligned with their theological view of community transformation (demonstrating the principles of Christian faith and systematic inquiry).

In addition, they further articulated to stakeholders their rationale for utilizing this measure and why this was so important in relationship with God’s kingdom (demonstrating the principles of integrity and transparency). They explained that the measure captures beliefs and attitudes about when violence against women is acceptable and will help FH confront those beliefs with alternative, kingdom-honoring beliefs (demonstrating the principles of Christian faith and respect for all people). For a CCO like FH, intimate partner violence has proven to be an indicator that

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<sup>6</sup> The Pastoral Circle is explained by Myers (2011).

narrates the organization's involvement in God's story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

## Conclusion

The calling of Christ-centered M&E/MEAL is to collect, analyze, and use data to help stakeholders discern and document evidence of the expression of the kingdom and the presence of the king to the glory of God (not the CCO). Christ-centered M&E involves digging into data in relation to God's word to discover what he has revealed about himself. When the M&E team in a CCO is equipped to do this, they can come to know and love God, self, neighbor, and creation in even deeper ways, and bring stakeholders along with them on this journey to realizing God's kingdom here on earth.

## Editor's Post-Script

This article only scratches the surface of what can become a mutually enriching conversation on how our Christian faith comes to bear on the vital practices of M&E. The authors of this article and the editors of CRDA invite other M&E practitioners and theorists to share their experiences and reflections in these pages. Such topics as theological paradigms, objectives, indicators, methods, strategies, case studies, and more, are all on the table. Such contributions may generally agree with the framework presented here, but that is not necessary. The overall goal is for us to learn from each other in a process that helps us be faithful to God in our efforts to serve our vulnerable neighbors and ultimately to honor, love, and serve him.

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