

MicroSave Briefing Note #163

Building MIS Capacity for Social Performance Reporting

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March 2015

Background

Timely access to accurate and relevant information is crucial in order to make responsive and mission-focused decisions at board, management and staff levels.

Philippines-based social enterprise¹ ASKI (Alalay sa Kaunlaran, Inc.) understood this issue when it embraced a balanced pursuit of social performance (SP) and financial performance (FP) to attain its vision for the holistic socio-economic transformation of marginalised communities and individuals. ASKI recognised that it would only be possible to manage both SP and FP successfully with the support of a sound management information system (MIS).

This Briefing Note describes the processes that ASKI followed to determine MIS requirements and the initial steps that were taken in 2014 to improve the MIS so that SP reporting was brought into balance with FP reporting.²

Understanding and Taking Action

Knowing what SP data to track

The ASKI Board and management underwent a series of workshops and exercises to understand how the current MIS generated and used social data. The exercises that were conducted trained them to:

- Map³ the decisions that were regularly made and understand data used to make those decisions; a decision mapping template was used by all ASKI departments and relevant business units.

Table 1. Part of Decision Map of Credit Operations

#	Decision	SP Data Points Needed to Make the Decision
1	New product to develop	Client demand, which could be taken from: -client satisfaction survey -client exit survey -client feedback mechanism Competition Analysis

- Identify and map the social data currently available and document where it comes from, how it is stored, validated, analysed and reported/used.

Table 2. Part of Data Map of Credit Operations

SP Data: Client Exit Survey	
Where does data come from?	Branches
What is the formula? (If applicable).	Use standard MIX Formula
What is frequency of data collection?	When clients drop out
Who is responsible for data review?	Accounting Assistant
Who is responsible for data processing and reporting (position or unit)?	Research Department
In what form is data provided to users, e.g. name of report?	Client Exit Survey Report
How frequently is data reported?	Annually
To whom is data provided (position and/or unit)?	Director of Credit Operations
How is data used in decision making?	To address operational areas that make clients drop out
How frequently is data used?	Periodic Board meetings
What are the challenges in data management?	Survey is costly to administer
What are the suggestions for addressing challenges?	Integrate into the core process

- Map relevant social indicators from both internal and external sources such as Opportunity International SPM Dashboard and MIX SP indicators. ASKI expanded its internal list to accommodate key SP indicators that conform to global practices and standards. This consolidated list provided management with a starting point from which a final set of ASKI SP indicators were selected.

These exercises encouraged the management to talk about the issues and challenges that confront data providers and users, and enabled them to explore ways in which better MIS is created in line with the business needs of the institution and various departments.

ASKI recognised that it collects and stores a great deal of social and financial data. However, that data is not easily accessible as it comes from a variety of sources and is not stored on one server or available in one common IT language to facilitate cross sharing. Much of the client data collected at the branches remains on paper because it is not encoded into the database.

Consequently, these rich sources of information are not easily available for wider use within the organisation. For example, client information gathered during business sales is mainly used to assess the credit worthiness of a

¹ASKI used to be content with being referred to as an MFI (microfinance institution). However, when Social Performance Management (SPM) was brought into the mainstream within the organisation over many years, ASKI adopted the term 'social entrepreneur', as it pursues two equal bottom lines - financial viability and social responsibility.

²In 2014, ASKI received support from Opportunity International Australia and technical assistance from MicroSave to prepare its MIS for SP reporting.

³Mapping refers to a simple framework for profiling SP data—from identifying what specific data is needed to where it will be used; from how it is derived, stored and shared to who is responsible for each part

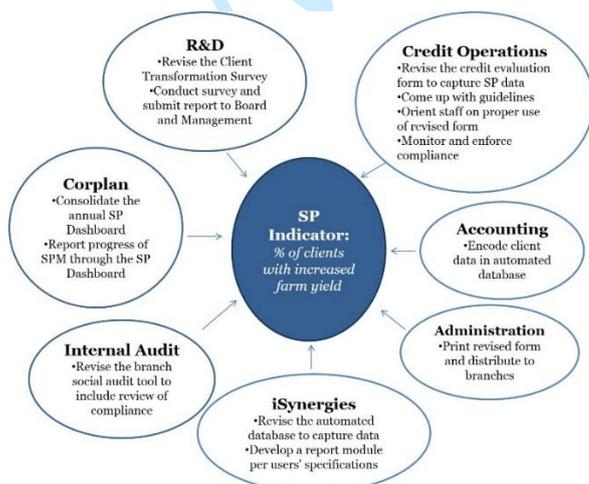
client. Yet it could be used as baseline data, which when tracked over time could demonstrate changes in the financial capacity of clients. This could help enable ASKI to understand which products and services transform their clients' lives for the better, and how they do it.

In ASKI, other departments and business units also collect client data for specific purposes.⁴ Along with department specific survey questions, these mini-surveys also collect the profile of the respondent. However, the data coming from these surveys is analysed separately (manually) by the individual departments. Having a facility in which all survey data of different departments is fed into a common MIS will bring in greater flexibility for research activities. The MIS could produce automated reports based on survey results in combination with other client-related parameters (location, gender, loan type, etc.). The reduction of manual intervention in this way would reduce chances of error. While making the survey process more efficient, it would facilitate deeper analysis and production of information-rich reports for use in decision making.

Knowing who is responsible in data management

Having adopted social objectives supported by concrete SP indicators with measurable targets, ASKI made MIS adjustments for collecting data that could be tracked over time. To track 48 SP indicators with varying periodicity (monthly, quarterly, annually etc.), no less than ten departments and business units have come together to perform roles and responsibilities consistent with their specialised functions. The SP indicator map guides concerned players on what is expected of each one.

The purpose of the MIS work in 2014 was to put a system in place by December 2015 that could gather, store, analyse and report all the required data through the study called *The SP Dashboard for the Board*. An example of an SP indicator in which many key implementers participated is as follows:



It is no small feat to meet the SP data management requirements in a coordinated and timely manner.

⁴Within the ASKI Group of Companies, relevant independent business units identified as supportive of the SP drive are: ASKI Training (client and staff capacity building), ASKI Foundation (community development, health, education and environment) and ASKI iSynergies (technology and information management).

Encouragement from concerned heads of department facilitated implementation; however that was not enough to complete the required tasks. Other work priorities cropped up which diverted the attention of implementers. Delays in setting up the data management system within the year indicate the necessity for a strong coordinating body to monitor implementers and enforce accountability.

Moving Forward

The experience yielded many lessons. A more robust MIS can be built as a result of the knowledge acquired.

Know what SP data to track. Tools such as the data maps can help to outline the data requirements clearly. For example, transformation indicators such as employment creation or agricultural yield by planting season must be archived (and not overwritten at every loan renewal) to allow for determining change and trend analysis over time. In addition to data maps, it is important for the requesting stakeholder to document the required deliverables from the service provider. For example, is it enough to provide data capture fields in the automated database? Or are data reports also needed? If so, what report format is needed?

Coordinate, cooperate and monitor proactively. Data management which involves the participation of many players requires a strong coordinating body. While ASKI did form an SPM Team to coordinate and monitor SPM efforts including the establishment of a SP data management system, it only focused on the appointment of three members—coming from Corporate Planning, Research and Training. It did not provide a written and accepted Terms of Reference to indicate the functions and responsibilities of the Team and their level of authority. This would have given the SPM Team the guidance and mandate it needed to perform its tasks. For committee work to be effective, the necessary time and resources should be allocated to the members to perform committee work in addition to their regular duties. Clear institutional expectations on how the committee work would be assessed for accountability and success would also be useful.

Tap technology supported by appropriate processes. Use of technology brings efficiency but entails cost. Use of new forms and inclusion of more processes involving data management (encoding, validation and reporting) requires proper staff orientation and compliance monitoring. Resources can be secured by integrating them into the Strategic Business Plan. A robust MIS for ASKI in the medium-term should be able to integrate the collection of relevant SP data in regular functions and make processed data widely accessible to decision-makers. This requires coordinated planning and committed execution—from start to end—by all the relevant implementers within the institution.