

Mariam Smith



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Profile

Having grown up and worked in multi-cultural settings my whole life, I enjoy getting to know new people and contexts through the work that I do. I see it as a privilege to get to know others wanting to make a difference in this world and to learn from their experiences. I am energised by challenges and like to try out new ways of doing things, but have a strong commitment to making things work in practice. When I find a free moment, I get out into nature to be reminded of our world being such an amazing place.

Work History

Learning Loop, 2016 until present

Learning loop is a small consultancy company started by Mariam and Phil Smith which supports organisations in evaluation and developing learning systems for complex development programs. We have also conducted trainings and workshops on various actor-focused approaches. Our consultancy builds on our own work experience from Cambodia and Sweden, but each new consultancy across different countries and organisations in the Global South and Global North has provided added insights. Learning Loop specialises in actor focused M&E approaches and adaptive management, including Outcome Mapping, Outcome Harvesting and Most-significant change. Main tasks include:

- Training and support in actor focused planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches.
- Program design and evaluation
- Qualitative and quantitative data analysis and visualisation
- Small and large group process design and facilitation, real-life and online, using a variety of tools and participatory processes.
- Creating toolkits for participatory monitoring and evaluation

We have a specific interest in working with local organisations in the global south, usually working together with funding partners.

Clients include: ADRA, Taksvärkki, Olof Palme Centre, UNICEF, World Concern Myanmar, Life and Peace Institute, CODE, Erikshjälpen, SweFOR, SIL, and PMU. For a full list of Learning Loop projects and clients please visit: <http://www.learningloop.co/our-work>.

Identity-Based Community Development and Education Programme, Mondulkiri, Cambodia, 2013 - 2015

Programme managed and advised the work of 70 staff who worked alongside indigenous minorities in northeastern Cambodia in a rights- and identity based approach to livelihoods, education and community development.

Building Community Involvement in Bilingual Education Project, Mondulkiri, Cambodia, 2010-2012

Coordinated action research, working with a team of three local staff and 6 target villages, exploring how education can become culturally relevant and communities mobilised in regards to their indigenous peoples' rights to education.

Parental leave / research assistant, Mondulkiri, 2008-2010

Non-Formal Education Coordinator/Staff Trainer, ICC READ project, Mondulkiri, Cambodia 2003-2008

Coordinating a Non-Formal Education program among the Bunong minority group in Mondulkiri, Cambodia and advising the Provincial Department of Education's formal and non-formal education multilingual programs.

Other work experiences

- Strategic management and facilitation as a steward and board member in the Outcome Mapping Learning Community 2017 - current.
- 4th international Conference on Language and Education, Bangkok, 2013 - Presentation and report on "Building Community Involvement in Multilingual Education" with colleague Srom Bunthy.
- Primary School Teacher; Göteborg, Sweden 2001-2002 - Taught grades KG-3 in a multi-grade classroom of 30 students.
- Primary School Teacher; Ratanakiri, Cambodia 1999-2001 - Taught expatriate children in a multi-grade school setting and on the free time learned the Khmer language and helped in numeracy activities of ICC's Non-Formal Education program in Ratanakiri.

Education

Masters in Pedagogy, University of Skövde, 2015-2017 studying organisational communication and learning with a focus on tools.

Other Education and training

- Advanced Outcome Harvesting Course, Bologna, Centre for International Development, June, 2017
- SIL Horsley's Green, U.K. - Multilingual Education Course, March 2005
- SIL Horsley's Green, U.K. - Literacy Specialist Training, Fall 2002
- Oral Roberts University, Oklahoma, U.S. - BA Elementary Education, 1995-1999

Skills

Language skills

- Mother tongue language skills (CEFR level C2) in Swedish and English
- Verbal and written language skills in Khmer (national language of Cambodia) and Bunong (ethnic minority group living in Cambodia and Vietnam).
- Some basic language skills in Bengali, Thai, and French.

Communication skills

- Although a Swedish citizen, 24 years have been spent in Asia and four years in the U.S., enabling easy transition between Asian, European, and American cultures.
- My working approach has strong values of collaboration, high levels of participation and appropriate inclusion (considering age, gender, ethnicity/language, religion, socio-economic status, etc.).
- I am used to leading processes of looking at results (outcomes) which often leads to adaptation in organisational practices and approaches and new/strengthened relationships.

Organisational skills

- I am highly dependable and responsible for the work I take on.



ADRA Mozambique staff and Mariam supporting youth to write up their own outcomes during an evaluation.

We have run our own small firm for the last six years where we take care of completion of tasks, including contracts and finances. When additional tasks have been required, new timelines have been agreed upon with the client.

- Previously, working as project/programme manager, I built the capacity of a management team to lead teams, and organised work and tools around a common vision with rhythms and spaces to reflect on progress and outcomes.

Job-related skills

- Understanding a team's drive and experience enables us to structure work/tools/results frameworks in ways that make sense to the team while not losing focus on the vision.
- The actor-centred approaches Outcome Mapping, Outcome Harvesting, and Most Significant Change are my main tools which I have worked with separately or in combination and adapted for many different contexts and organisations.

Digital skills

- Competent use of word processing and spreadsheet programmes.
- 4 years of experience of hosting and facilitating online processes using Zoom and Mural.
- I have used various qualitative data analysis programmes
- In several evaluation processes, I have used blogs for including various organisational staff, partners, and donors in the processes.



Actor Mapping with a team in Thailand during an Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting training in November 2022.

Publications

Ball, J., & Smith, M. (2020). *Focusing on Actors in Context-Specific, Data-Informed Theories of Change to Increase Inclusion in Quality Basic Education Reforms*. Global Education Review, 7(1), 20-40. <https://ger.mercy.edu/index.php/ger/article/view/538>

Ball, J., & Smith, M. (2021). *Essential components in planning multilingual education: a case study of Cambodia's Multilingual Education National Action Plan*. Current Issues in Language Planning, 1-21.

Whose Story: Exploring communicative practices among international development organisations using learning approaches designed for complex situations. Masters dissertation within pedagogy published 2017, available at <http://his.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1117376/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Examples and references

Cambodia Multilingual Education action plan evaluation, UNICEF - this evaluation was a collaborative work co-led with Dr Jessica Ball and demonstrates my ability to integrate high level technical evaluations with community perspectives and involvement and develop actor-focused theories of change. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/evaluation-multilingual-education-national-action-plan-cambodia>

Taksvärkki's program evaluation and theory of change development, co-led with Learning Loop partner Phil Smith. This participatory evaluation process with two of Taksvärkki's partners in Malawi and Zambia working with youth empowerment demonstrates how we were able to translate a meaningful organisational learning process using Outcome Harvesting, Outcome Mapping and Process tracing into an online setting. A blog of the process is available here <https://tak20eval.wordpress.com>

and the final report available here <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ZVGh3V-drnS73cSY8SFH-mzm3LipWAVaw> After the evaluation, Taksvärkki also invited us to help them develop an actor-focused ToC for their next strategic programme cycle.