

THE GAP

Programme M&E does not fail for lack of effort. It fails mechanically.

Field staff work hard and report honestly. The instruments they are given simply cannot produce what they are being asked to produce. Five mechanisms, each of which the tool either fixes or does not:

- 1 The baseline is paper, and the paper stays in the field.**
 A form filled at enrolment records intent — plot size, household, what she plans to grow. It is written once, filed once, and rarely opened again. When the funder asks in month nine what actually happened, the only honest answer available is another survey.
- 2 The year-end survey asks the farmer to remember.**
 Harvest weights recalled eleven months later are estimates wearing the clothes of data. Nobody is lying. A recall instrument produces recall, and recall degrades — reliably, in one direction, and worst for the small repeated harvests that make up most of a household garden's real output.
- 3 A claim in a spreadsheet has no place and no date.**
 "Hectares under production" carries no coordinate, no timestamp, no photograph and no boundary. It cannot be checked at all without sending a person, which means in practice it is mostly not checked.
- 4 Verification competes with wages for the same money.**
 In stipend-based programmes the grant is overwhelmingly wages by design, and rightly so. Every enumerator trip is money that did not reach a participant — so verification is squeezed until it is thin enough to be affordable, and thin verification is the kind that gets challenged.
- 5 The farmer gets nothing back for filling it in.**
 Data flows one way: she completes the form, the report goes upward, nothing returns to her plot. So the form is a tax on her time — and the quality of anything collected that way reflects exactly that.

What the current instrument gives you

- ✗ A number with no place, no date and no photograph attached to it
- ✗ Recall standing in for measurement, months after the fact
- ✗ Coverage limited by how many site visits the budget can carry
- ✗ Nothing at all between one visit and the next
- ✗ A farmer who has no reason to care whether the number is right

What would have to be true instead

- ✓ The record is made at the moment of work, by the person doing it
- ✓ It carries its own coordinate and its own date, automatically
- ✓ The farmer gets something back for making it — a plan, a warning, her own running total
- ✓ The funder can see it without a trip, and only where she agreed
- ✓ The gaps are visible as gaps, not silently filled in with zeros