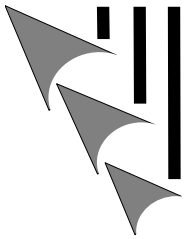
Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation

Using the Logical Framework Approach

Developed and Presented by:

Umhlaba Development Services



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How To Use This Manual

This training manual follows a systematic process of introduction to monitoring and evaluation ("M&E") utilising the logical framework approach to project design. It is structured as a basic guide to M&E within projects designed according to the *European Commission – EuropeAid Project Cycle Management Handbook*, and there is significant reference to the method described therein. Another guide that has been referred to significantly in this manual is the IFAD *A Guide for Project M&E*. It is recommended that you access these (excellent) documents to continue your further reading in M&E.

Ideally this manual provides summarized information to complement a training session facilitated by an experienced M&E practitioner. It can be used as a guide on its own without the formal training, but this is not advised without significant extra reading and mentoring. You are therefore encouraged to seek further information and support.

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Section 1

Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation and the Logical Framework

Monitoring and Evaluation

Learning Outcomes for this Section

- Reviewing the definitions of monitoring concepts
- Understanding the difference between monitoring and evaluation
- Reviewing Project Cycle Management and the Logical Framework
- Acquainting ourselves with the Project Planning Matrix
- Reviewing the role of Indicators and Means of Verification

What is Monitoring?

Project management has the task of establishing sufficient controls over a project to ensure that it stays on track towards the achievement of its objectives. This is done by monitoring (internal), which is the systematic and continuous collection, analysis and use of information for management control and decision-making.

In this instance implementation is seen as a continuous learning process where experience gathered is analysed and fed back into planning and updated implementation approaches.

Project monitoring is an integral part of day-to-day management. It provides information by which management can identify and solve implementation problems, and assess progress. The *Logical Framework*, the *implementation schedule*, *activity schedules*, and *project budget* provide the basis for this monitoring. There are a number of different levels of monitoring, each related to what kind of information is relevant, and the regularity of monitoring. The table below illustrates some examples.

Monitoring Level	**Regularity**
Which Activities are underway and what progress has been made?	Weekly
At what rate are means being used and cost incurred in relation to progress in implementation?	Monthly
Are the desired Results being achieved?	Quarterly
To what extent are these Results furthering the Project Purpose? What changes in the project environment occur? Do the Assumptions hold true?	Six-Monthly

Evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and Results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors.

Evaluation differs from monitoring in three respects:

- Timing
- Focus
- Level of Detail

Monitoring and evaluations are interactive and mutually supportive processes. Monitoring and evaluation of development activities therefore provides government officials, development managers, and civil society with better means for learning from past experience, improving service delivery, planning and allocating resources, and demonstrating results as part of accountability to key stakeholders.

In order to fully understand the role of monitoring in development projects, some revision of project planning and management is necessary.

What is a Project?

Experiences with development planning were viewed as unsatisfactory prior to 1960s, because national plans tended to lack focus and defined output (they were untargeted), and "participation" in projects by stakeholders was the prerogative of national governments, and was often neglected. During 1960s-70s period the project became the primary means through which governments of developing countries translated their development plans and policies into programmes of action. Projects were (and still are) seen to act as a crucial coordinating mechanism for the implementation of policy and the integration of resources and institutions.

The Project Management Institute defines a project as "a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. *Temporary* means that every project has a definite end. *Unique* means that the product or service is different in some distinguishing way from all similar products or services."

Projects differ in size, scope cost and time, but all have the following characteristics:

- A ***start*** and a ***finish***
- A ***life cycle*** involving a series of phases in between the beginning and end
- A ***budget***
- A set of ***activities*** which are sequential, unique and non-repetitive
- Use of ***resources*** which may require coordinating
- Centralised ***responsibilities*** for management and implementation
- Defined ***roles*** and ***relationships*** for participants in the project

The term "***project***" could therefore be taken to mean a group of activities undertaken to produce a Project Purpose in a fixed time frame. In development terms a "***programme***" is taken to mean a series of projects whose objectives together contribute to a common Overall Objective, at sector, country or even multi-country level.

Project Cycle Management

The way in which projects are planned and carried out follows a sequence beginning with an agreed strategy, which leads to an idea for a specific action, oriented towards achieving a set of objectives, which then is formulated, implemented, and evaluated with a view to improving the strategy and further action.

Project Cycle Management is an approach to managing projects. It determines particular phases of the Project, and outlines specific actions and approaches to be taken within these phases. The PCM approach provides for planning and review processes throughout a cycle, and allows for multiple project cycles to be supported.

The project cycle also provides a structure to ensure that stakeholders are consulted and relevant information is available throughout the life of the project, so that informed decisions can be made at key stages in the life of a project.

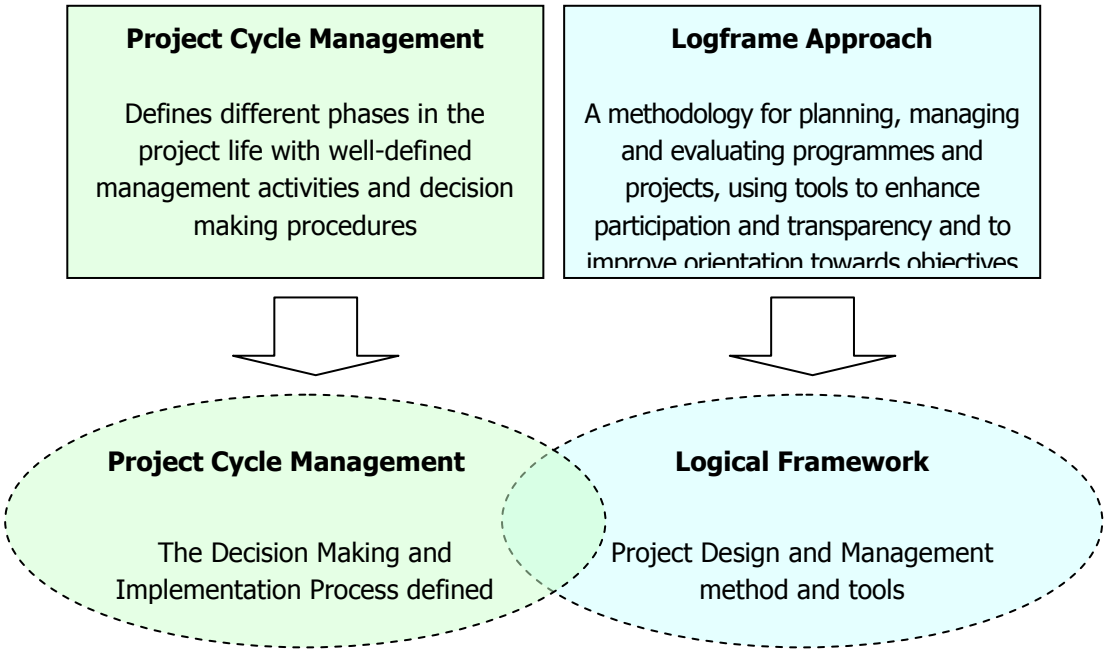
While the scope and scale (and the manner of approach) differs between projects, and the development agencies concerned, some elements remain the same. For example, within all EC programmes the cycle shares three common themes:

- Key decisions, information requirements and responsibilities are defined at each phase.
- The phases in the cycle are progressive – each phase needs to be completed for the next to be tackled with success.
- New programming draws on evaluation to build experience as part of the institutional learning process.

Aid co-operation and partnership programmes often involve complex processes that require the active support of many parties. PCM is intended to ensure that stakeholders support the decisions made within projects, and that decisions are based on relevant and sufficient information.

PCM and LFA

PCM reflects the decision-making and implementation process; the methodology applied for planning, managing, evaluating projects is the *Logical Framework Approach*.

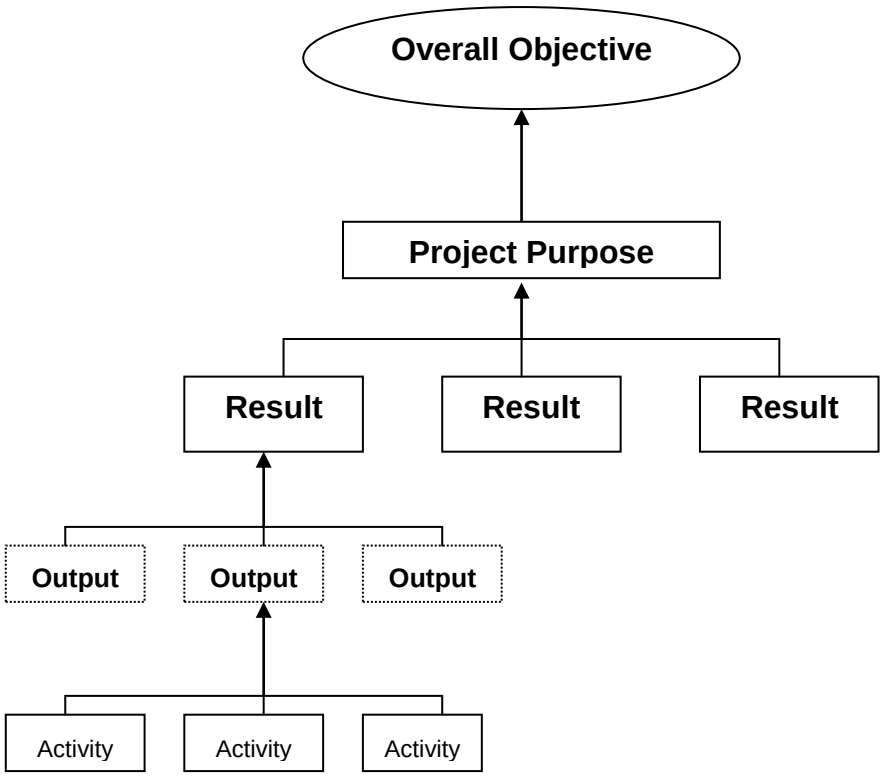


The LogFrame Approach

The logical framework approach follows a hierarchical results oriented planning structure and methodology which focuses all project planning elements on the achievement of one project purpose.

The Project elements in LFA are recorded and presented according to a matrix format. This format is called the Project Matrix (PM), or Project Planning Matrix (PPM), and allows for a complete project to be represented in a clear and related manner. The PPM allows for ease of understanding and sets the basis for Project Cycle Management to occur.

Represented graphically the hierarchical logic of the objectives of the logframe approach is as follows.



The Steps of Logframe

There are seven distinct stages of "steps" in the LFA planning methodology. These are broadly categorised according to two processes: the ***Analysis*** process, and the ***Design*** process.

Analysis

This consists of four distinct steps:

Step 1: Stakeholder Analysis

Step 2: Problem Analysis

Step 3: Objectives Analysis

Step 4: Strategy Analysis

Design / Planning

This consists of three steps:

Step 5: Project Plan (Logframe)

Step 6: Activity Planning

Step 7: Resource Scheduling (budgeting)

The steps are sequential – they must follow in order for the project plan to make sense!

The Project Plan

In Steps 1-4, important information is analysed and ordered to assist the project design process. By following the iterative style of planning, LFA enables the project analysis to be amended for clarity and logic. By the time you have completed Step 4, you should be able to design your project intervention.

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PROJECT PLANNING MATRIX			
Intervention Logic	**Indicators**	**Means of Verification**	**Assumptions**
Overall Objective			
Project Purpose			
Results			
Activities	**Means**	**Cost**	**Pre-Conditions**

The logical framework matrix is a way of presenting the substance of an intervention in a comprehensive form. The matrix has four columns and four rows:

- ☞ The *vertical logic* (or *intervention logic*) identifies what the project intends to do, clarifies the causal relationships and specifies the important assumptions and risks beyond the project manager's control.

- ☞ The *horizontal logic* relates to the measurement of the effects of, and resources used by the project through the specification of key indicators, and the sources where they will be verified.

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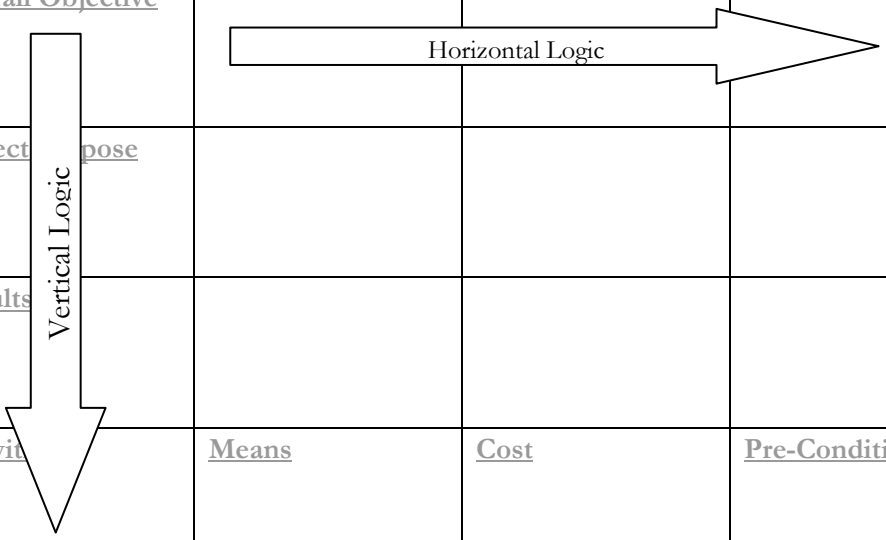


The PPM contains four key elements of the Project:

a) The Objectives of the Project
b) The project Activities, Means and Costs
c) The Assumptions made for the project
d) The Indicators required to monitor the Project

The PPM Vertical Logic

The first column of the PPM is called the intervention logic. This refers to the objectives and activities for the Project. The objectives of the PPM are represented at different levels. These can be described as:

Overall Objective:

This is a general development objective that refers to the long-term benefits to an entire population, but is outside of the Project control, and is what the Project will contribute to. Normally the overall objective relates and links to a national

objective.

Project Purpose:

This refers to what the specific objective of the project is, and describes the changed situation the Project should result in if it achieves its results. The Project Purpose should define the sustainable benefits for the target group/s. It may reflect a change in the target group's behaviour, or the benefits that will accrue to them. There is normally only one project purpose.

Results:

The results are a statement of the outcome, or the effects of the activities undertaken. If all of Results were achieved, we would expect that the Project Purpose be achieved as a consequence. Although they are numbered, Results are defined according to logical areas and not sequential (they do not have to happen in order), Results are within the control of the Project - they are what the Project guarantees it can deliver. They describe the effect of the completion of the activities.

The objectives in LFA are stated as outcomes - that is as if they have already happened. We therefore state at the beginning of the project what our expected situation is at the end of the Project!

Activities

These are the sequential steps necessary to achieve a result. They are the tasks to be carried out according to each result. Each activity needs to be specific and detailed to allow for complete clarity as to what is to be done, and to allow for budgeting. The activities must be numbered in sequence according to the relevant result!

Means

These are the necessary means to undertake the activities. They include personnel, materials, and infrastructure. They describe the resources required for the successful implementation of the project activities. They are also basically a list of items that will need to be budgeted for.

Cost

This states the overall cost of the project, and the expected sources. It is *not* a detailed budget!

Defining Assumptions

For the purpose of Project planning, it is essential that the external context be given consideration in the plan. These key considerations are in the form of *assumptions*. This will allow for recognition of why a project has not succeeded due to factors outside its control.

The assumptions made in the Project design must be recorded. These are the conditions that:

- ☞ Are outside of the Project's control; and,
- ☞ Must exist or take place for the Project to be successful.

In order to define which assumptions are to be included, first determine assumptions you make for each level of the objectives in the PPM. These may include:

- ☞ The actions of certain groups, or Project stakeholders
- ☞ Certain economic or social conditions, such as the absence of conflict
- ☞ Political conditions, such as stability
- ☞ Conditions of climate

Project Indicators and Means of Verification

Indicators are important monitoring mechanisms for assessing the progress of a plan. They allow for ongoing measurement with the Project Cycle. They are how the performance standard to be reached will be measured.

Indicators can be outputs (the tangible products produced from our activities) or impact indicators (measurements of change in situations or groups). Indicators do need to be:

- ❑ *Independent*: they measure only the objective, purpose or result to which they are linked
- ❑ *Factual*: they are based on factual measurement

- *Plausible*: it must be believable that they are measuring the change attributed to the project

- *Objectively verifiable*: we can verify whether they have been achieved

Much of the emphasis placed in plans is on quantitative units of measure – the number of participants, the number of workshops etc. For development projects impact indicators are as important – changes in attitude and behaviour, changes in quality of life etc. Impact indicators are often difficult to describe.

Indicators must also have a means of verification (MoV). The MoV is the source of data that serves as the "proof" for the indicator. In many cases this may be documents, or statistics.

Section 2

Project Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation

Learning Outcomes for this Section

- Understanding the importance of M&E and its relation to project design
- Understanding how project design influences M&E

Project Management and M&E

Many development agencies use planning and project management approaches that are focused on impact. According to IFAD "managing for impact" means you need to respond to changing circumstances and increased understanding by adapting the project so that it will be more likely to achieve its intended impact. Such adaptation may entail small changes to activities or larger strategic revisions.

Effective project management is therefore crucial to successful development projects, and hence monitoring and evaluation. To manage adaptively, project implementers and managers will need to:

- Understand the project design;
- Gather and analyse relevant information to make good decisions,
- Facilitate learning with all key stakeholders; and
- Negotiate required changes to project plans and processes.

Managing for impact is only possible if you have reliable information about the progress of activities and their outcomes, the reasons for success and failure, and the context in which activities are taking place. This information is the output of your M&E process. Analysing this information with key stakeholders can support good decisions that improve the project.

The four basic elements that will give you the information and insights you need.

- *Guiding the Project strategy* – understanding the goals and objectives of the project and then allocating the available resources and guiding relationship between stakeholders to maximise impact.
- *Creating a learning environment* – Inspiring and helping those involved with the project to reflect critically on progress, to learn from mistakes and to generate ideas for making improvements.
- *Ensuring Effective Operations* – planning organising and checking staff inputs, equipment, partner's contracts, financial resources, (bi) annual work plans, and communications to implement activities effectively and efficiently.

- *Developing and Using the M&E system* – designing and implementing information gathering and reflective learning processes it generate insights that help you to improve operations and strategic directions.

When you manage for impact, project design, annual planning and M&E become linked processes. Developing M&E therefore starts long before start-up. Initial project design strongly influences the ease with which M&E is implemented later on through, for example:

- The relationship and commitment established with partner and local people, particularly the intended primary stakeholders;
- The logic and feasibility of the project strategy;
- The resources allocated to M&E findings to have a steering function;
- Any operational details of M&E that might be established during initial design.

During project formulation, a broad M&E framework provides three essential elements:

a) sufficient detail to enable budgeting and allocation of technical expertise,

b) an overview of how M&E will be under taken, and

c) some guidance for project staff about how M&E should be set up in the start up.

Planning for learning and adaptation during implementation

An important criticism of many development projects is that they are too inflexible in planning, and that once projects are initiated the initial project plan is adhered to even if significant motivation exists to change it. This undermines the learning ethos of development! Projects should therefore plan for adaptation, specifically by trying to do the following:

- Design the process, as well as objectives, at the higher levels. Identify the forums and processes that will be used to involve stakeholders in project review and adaptation, and build in flexibility to respond to unplanned opportunities.

- Focus on clear goals (impacts) and purposes (outcomes), rather than over-specifying activities and outputs.

- Be explicit about uncertainty. Instead of trying to force specificity, explain what you simply do not yet know, such as exactly how communities will want to administer local development funds. Explain what is unknown and how when project management should be clear on issues

- Build mini-research phases at key moments. Not all issues of relevance to a project can be anticipated ahead of time. List as an activity and budget for "focused studies" to answer questions about the project context that may arise.

- Make it explicit that the project strategy and logframe matrix should be revised each year. Annual adjustments to the logframe and increasingly accepted and expected. A project design can indicate when and with whom this will take place.

- Make "adaptive management" a key function in the terms of reference for senior management and partner contracts. When hiring managers and selecting partners, select those who can balance uncertainty with being clear about poverty reduction goals.

- Budget for experimentation and for the unexpected. If the project is testing a new approach, then the budget should reflect this and more money should be allocated to later years when there is more certainty about expanding the approach. Also leave a portion of the budget and staff time for activities that do not fit into established categories.

The crucial thing to remember is that the development intervention is not about words in a plan, but changes in the lives of people, and in particular the intended beneficiaries. It is essential that development managers keep their focus on the intended impact, rather than on the rigidity of the planning format.

Knowing how to adjust the project strategy requires knowing how flexible you can be. There are two ways in which projects are adapted.

1. If projects are designed as open-ended strategies, with general directions indicated but with freedom for project partners to define the details of operations and activities…. you will refine the project strategy as you proceed with implementation. The more flexible the design. The more you will need a good M&E system to provide information that can help.

2. If the project has been rigidly designed, M&E findings may lead to the implementation partners to conclude that certain activities processes or relationships are no longer relevant or that other are missing.

It is important to remember that problems always occur in projects, and often occur on a daily basis in any project. ***They are not the same as failure.*** In fact mistakes can help in avoiding failure … but only if they are used for learning. It is common wisdom that we learn more from failure than success.

How initial Project Design Influences M&E

As we can see, project planning sets the crucial foundation for project M&E, and these can significantly affect the success or failure of an M&E process. Unintentionally, M&E is often set up to fail during the initial project design. Initial project design fundamentally influences M&E through five key design weaknesses.

First, during project implementation, the effectiveness of M&E will be greatly influenced by the attitude and commitment of local people and partners involved in the project and how they relate and communicate with each other. A poorly planned project will in most cases not generate positive relationships.

The second design fault is when project lacks logic in its strategy of has unrealistic objectives, making good M&E almost impossible. This is because the evaluation questions and indicators often become quite meaningless and will not produce useful information. Furthermore if you don't know clearly where you are heading then you will not know how best to use any information that might be produced.

The third is when the design team does not allocate enough resources to the M&E system. Critical resources include: funding for information management, participatory monitoring activities, field visits, etc time for a start-up phase that is long enough to establish the M&E and monitor and reflect, and expertise, such as a consultant to support M&E development.

The fourth factor is critical if M&E systems are to generate the learning that helps a group of project partners continually improve implementation and strategy. The more rigid a project design is, the more difficult the project team will have in adjusting it as a result of change in the context and understanding of interim impacts.

Fifth, it is important that during design, the broad framework of the M&E is established. It is still unfortunately the case that most project plans do not pay sufficient attention to M&E planning, with the result that M&E is "tagged on" as an afterthought.

Put simply, effective project planning is absolutely critical to the success of an M&E process, and an effective M&E process is a crucial component of successful projects!

Section 3

Planning for Monitoring and Evaluation

Learning Outcomes for this Section

- Understanding the role and structure of an M&E framework
- Developing the M&E Matrix
- Defining performance questions and indicators for projects
- Deciding on which methods to use in M&E

Developing the M&E Framework

As we have seen, project planning must incorporate planning of M&E elements, or else this will in all likelihood not be as effective and negatively affect the project process and outcomes. Setting up an M&E system involves six steps that need to be dealt with ***twice*** – generally at initial design and in detail at start-up.

1. Establish the purpose and scope – Why do we need M&E and how comprehensive should the M&E be?

2. Identifying performance questions, information needs and indicators – What do we need to know to monitor and evaluate the project in order to manage it well?

3. Planning information gathering and organising – how will the required information be gathered and organised?

4. Planning critical reflections process and events – How will we make sense of the information gathered and use it to make improvements?

5. Planning for quality communication and reporting – What, how and to whom do we want to communicate in terms of our project activities and processes?

6. Planning for the necessary conditions and capacities – What is needed to ensure that the M&E system actually works?

To use information most effectively for managing for impact, think about the key moments during the project life when strategic decisions are made. Information from M&E will be most useful if it feeds into these moments. These moments will be provided through the project plan, the implementation and activity schedules, and the duration of the project. It will not make much sense to plan M&E outside of the rhythm and duration of the project! In the logical framework the M&E framework is interlinked with the outputs-indicators-results sections of the project plan.

Seeing M&E as a system

Managing development projects require an operational M&E system. The M&E system is the set of planning, information gathering and synthesis, refection, and reporting processes, along with the necessary supporting conditions and capacities required for the outputs of M&E to make a valuable contributions to decision making and learning.

A well-functioning M&E system manages to integrate the more formal, data-orientated side commonly associated with the task of M&E together with informal monitoring and communication, such as project field staff sharing impressions of their fieldwork with each other and their managers over lunch (or coffee).

Seeing M&E as an integrated support to those involved in project implementation requires:

- Creating M&E processes that lead to clear and regular learning for all those involved in project strategy and operations;
- Understanding the links between M&E and management functions;
- Using existing processes of learning, communication and decision-making among stakeholders as a basis for project orientated M&E;
- Putting in place the necessary conditions and capacities for M&E to be carried out.

A good M&E system consists of four interlinked parts.

1. ***Planning***: Identifying information to guide the project strategy, ensure effective operations and meet external reporting requirements. Then deciding how to gather and analyse this information and document a plan for the M&E system.
2. ***Implementing***: Gathering and managing information through informal as well as more structured approaches. Information comes from tracking which outputs, outcomes and impacts are being achieved and checking project operations.
3. ***Participation***: Involving project stakeholders in reflecting critically. Once information has been collected it needs to be analysed and discussed by project stakeholders. Again, this may happen formally or informally.

4. ***Communication***: The results of M&E need to be communicated to the people who need to use it.

Ultimately the results from M&E – both the communication processes and information – will improve the project strategy and operations. Senior management is responsible for seeing to this with support of M&E staff. Sometimes improvements can be immediate. But sometimes more extensive negotiations may be required.

Purpose and scope of the M&E system

Clear definition of the purpose and scope of the intended M&E system helps when deciding of issues such as budget levels, number of indicators to track, type of communication needed and so forth. When formulating the project purpose at appraisal or revising it during start-up, ask yourself the following questions: What are the main reasons to set up and implement M&E for us – as implementing partners and primary stakeholders – and for other key stakeholders?

With shared understanding of the overall purpose, the next step is to clarify the scope of the M&E system. "Scope" relates to the extent and degree of sophistication of the system. M&E systems can be highly sophisticated, requiring considerable expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods and extensive information management. They can also be very simple systems that rely on discussions with stakeholders and do not try to gather large amounts of data.

The sophistication of the M&E system for any project depends on the M&E purpose, available resources and M&E expertise. Define the scope of the M&E system by asking:

- What level of funding is potentially available?
- What level of participation in M&E by primary stakeholder and partner organization is desirable and feasible?
- How detailed does the M&E information have to be, either in terms of quantitative or qualitative data?
- What sort of baseline study is desirable and feasible?
- What are the current M&E capacities among primary stakeholder and partner organizations, and how will this effect M&E activities?

Once you have a clear sense of the answers to these questions, you will have a broad parameter for your M&E system. The next steps are to develop these further into a plan for the project M&E. Like the project matrix in logical framework, this M&E plan can be captured in the form of a matrix – the M&E matrix (USAID uses a Performance Monitoring Plan format similar to the matrix). While it is important to give this process time, and the output detail, remember that the emphasis is on practicality and impact.

The value of the M&E Matrix

The logical framework approach (LFA) does not always provide much detailed guidance on what information is useful to track. The standard logframe matrix provides insufficient space for detailed M&E comments. Only two columns are suggested in which to summarise M&E: a column for indicators and one for means of verification

To make M&E operational you need much more detail, which in itself can help the project design in the logframe. This requires implementing the following steps.

Step1. Identifying performance questions

Rather than starting with indicators, first identify performance questions. This helps you focus your information gathering on what you will really use for understanding and improving project performance.

Step 2 Identifying information needs and indicators

Using your performance questions you can move to easily identify useful indicators and other information needs for which you will need to collect data. Only data that helps answer you performance questions are necessary.

Step 3 Knowing what baseline information you need

When deciding whether you need to collect baseline data for a particular performance question, ask yourself if you need to compare information to be able to answer the question. If not, or if information already exists, then you will not need to collect baseline data.

Step 4 Which data collection methods to use, by whom and how often

Once you have decided what information is needed and what indicators will be used for gathering the data. You have many options: methods that are more qualitative or

more quantitative, more or less participatory, and more or less resource intensive. Each will provide information of varying degrees of accuracy and reliability.

Step 5 Identifying the necessary practical support for information gathering

For a method to lead to the information you require, you will need to organise the conditions to make it work. For each method, consider if and how you need to:

- Develop forms to record data;
- Develop forms, filing systems and databases for collating and storing information;
- Train staff, partners or community members who will be involved;
- Check and validate data;
- Organise external M&E or research expertise that may be needed;
- Agree on responsibilities for different tasks;
- Ensure everyone has sufficient financial resources and equipment.

Step 6: Planning the Presentation, Communication and Use of M&E Data

To make sure that data will be used – and not just collected – think about how you will organise the analysis of information for each performance question. More importantly, consider how the generated information can be used to check progress and make improvement as the project proceeds.

The outcomes of these steps can be summarized in an M&E matrix, which contains the following information:

- Performance questions;
- Information needs and indicators;
- Baseline information: Requirements, status and responsibilities;
- Data-gathering methods, frequency and responsibilities;
- Implementation Support: Required forms, planning, training, data management, expertise, resources and responsibilities;
- Communication: Analysis, reporting, feedback and change processes and responsibilities.

An example of an M&E Matrix is as follows:

Performance Question	Indicators and Information Needs	Baseline Information	Data Methods	Implementation Support	Communication

Each row of the matrix is completed for each result / outcome. Remember that the exercise needs to be practical within the capacities and resources of your project. Probably the biggest complaint of project M&E staff is that monitoring many indicators gets in the way of the "real" work of implementation. It is very important to reduce data collection to the minimum necessary to meet key management, learning and reporting needs. Trying to monitor too much can ruin the entire M&E system. Keep the M&E plan – summarised by the matrix – as simple and practical as possible!

Performance questions, information needs and indicators

Both the World Bank and IFAD work with the notion of performance indicators or performance questions. We will draw of IFAD's concept of the Performance Question to assist us in developing indicators and components of the M&E matrix. Using performance questions addresses one of the weaknesses of the lograme matrix, the often-overwhelming focus on target based indicators based on numbers of activities or outputs. The emphasis on targets sometimes detracts from the key question of what we are trying to achieve, and hence measure for our results.

Working with performance questions to guide indicators analysis will give you more integrated and meaningful picture of overall project achievements. Answering these questions requires descriptive analysis and quantitative information. Starting by identifying performance questions makes it easier to recognise which specific indicators are really necessary. Sometimes a performance question can be answered directly with a simple quantitative indicator. However, very often the question can only answered with a range of qualitative and quantitative information.

Performance questions are not just about what has been achieved. They also ask why there is success or failure and what has been learned to improve future action. Identifying performance questions for each level of the objective hierarchy before detailing indicators helps you focus your information gathering on what will truly advance understanding and improve project performance. Performance questions are very useful for projects that are trying to innovate the how to of development.

With performance questions, you can start identifying what information you need. This can include indicators and, possibly, additional background information that allows you to interpret the data from the indicators. Indicators will only ever show a partial view. They represent a simplification of approximation of a situation. An indicator simply helps communicate changes that are usually more complex. Using an indicator often means reducing data to the symbolic representation of a project objective, in a way that is relevant and significant for people who will use the information.

Therefore multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative information are critical to explain what is happening and to look closely at relationships between different pieces of information, rather than single indicators. Almost any topic that needs to monitor can be assessed using either quantitative or qualitative indicators, according to the kind of information you need. When working with indicators to assess impact, you are trying to create an overall picture built of various aspects. So one indicator or even several will not be adequate to understand the changes. For impact assessments, a description analysis rather than single indicators often better capture the overall changes.

So to begin to define your performance questions, and related indicators, you need to follow a number of steps. Remember that planning is an iterative exercise. You are dealing with a number of steps that can be discussed and detailed simultaneously. You can also go back to change aspects of the plan. It's your plan!

Step 1: Ask the Performance Question

Take the project purpose and each project result and ask this of each: "What questions would you need to answer to know the extent to which you are achieving the objective (project purpose or result) and to explain the success or failure of the project?" The resultant questions may be simple, and there shouldn't be too many.

Step 2: Define the change intended and the necessary information

You then need to be very clear about the information you will need to answer your performance question. Because your result is about change, and the performance questions will often be about change, it is important to define the type of change you are trying to achieve or measure in your project. Change can be reflected as:

- The presence of something (that may have not been there before)
- The type of access to a service or product (improved, enhanced or better)
- The level of use (increased, longer)
- The extent of an activity or coverage (numbers, extent)
- The relevance of an innovation (appropriate)
- The quality of an innovation or intervention (improved, enhanced, better)
- The effort required to achieve change (less labour, simpler process)

Once you have determined the change you are measuring, this will help you in determining what kind of information you are looking for, and then appropriate indicators for these.

Step 3: Define appropriate indicators

Once you have determined performance questions and information needed, you need to define or review your indicators. Ideally this level of planning should be conducted within the project planning process, and influence the logframe resulting from it. However, this is not always possible, and many indicators may have been set in draft form in your initial logframe plan. This exercise will help to elaborate and clarify the initial indicators.

Ideally, you will need to determine different types of indicators for each result and related performance question/s. These can be of the following:

- *Input indicators*: These describe what goes into the project, such as the number of hours training, the amount of money spent, the number of contraceptives distributed etc;

- *Output Indicators*: These describe project activities such as the number of community workers trained, the number of workshops, the production of materials etc;

- *Impact indicators*: These indicators measure actual change in the target group or a situation, such as improved livelihoods, enhanced service quality etc.

Once these have been defined, the nature of the indicator needs consideration. There are three broad categories of indicators that are used most often:

- *Quantitative*: This is often stated in the form of numbers. They are most often related to the total of activity implemented or outputs produced within a specified period of time;

- *Qualitative*: This reflects a change in quality, in the form of changes in attitude, quality etc. It may be reflected in perceptions, or numbers (% change etc);

- *Proxy*: These "indirect" indicators are used when it is difficult to directly measure a result, or change. We then determine an indicator that is symbolic, or approximate of the change we are measuring. For example, if we find difficulty in directly measuring improvements in household income, we may determine an indicator that measures increased purchasing of a

necessary household item, or increased savings. Proxy indicators rely on cause and effect assumptions – so be clear about these.

An important consideration in defining your indicators is that of *attribution*. This refers to the extent to which the change you are measuring is directly attributable, or the result of, your project activities. In many instances change is the result of a range of different contributing factors, so it is important to be realistic and specific about what change you are measuring as the consequence of your project. The more specific the indicator, the better. In some cases you will need to acknowledge that your project is simply contributing to the change intended.

Working with qualitative information and indicators

The strong focus of M&E on quantitative data in the past is increasingly being balanced by a focus on qualitative indicators as people expect these to provide more in depth information. We do not need to dwell too much on the value of either type of indicator, as these types of indicators are interchangeable and compatible.

For qualitative indicators to offer rigorous insights into important questions, you need to be specific - just as with quantitative indicators. Specify qualitative indicators by defining the following:

- The topic of interest;
- The type of change you are trying to understand, including the unit of analysis (e.g. changes in a household, in a village, in a region);
- The timeframe over which it will be monitored;
- The location in which the indicator will be applied.

For qualitative indicators, the idea of "measurable" refers to the ability to find data on it rather than being able to count it. You might well have set a qualitative aspect of development that cannot be moulded into indicators to measure. Examples include "social mobilisation process", "collective management" or "linkages with service providers". In such cases, the use of case studies that describe what is happening in a community may help you understand such processes.

Being clear about an indicator is what makes it measurable. But other factors will determine if you can use it. The need for a measurable, and therefore a small, set of indicators makes it especially important to ensure they are high quality. Review each potential indicator to ensure that it is not only clearly defined but is also representative, reliable and feasible.

An indicator is fully representative if it covers the most important aspect(s) of the objective you want to track. As this will be hard to do for higher-level objectives, you will probably need several indicators to make sure the set of indictors is representative of the type of change you want to understand.

An indicator is more likely to be reliable if it is accurate, measured in a standardised way with sound and consistent sampling procedures and directly reflects the objectives concerned. It should be well founded, with a well-established or probable relationship to the objective.

An indicator is feasible if it requires data that can be obtained at reasonable cost and effort. You will need to consider both financial and technical feasibility.

Comparing to see change

One of the first concrete tasks that you as a project director or M&E unit coordinator are likely to face is establishing baselines. To see change, you will need to make a comparison. A baseline serves as a point of comparison. You have three options, each with their advantages and disadvantages.

1. Compare the situation "before the project started" of for example, a community, household or organization with the situation "after it started".

2. Track changes with and without a project presence, which means comparing changes inside the project area with those win similar locations outside the project area.

3. Compare differences between similar groups – one that has been working with the project and a so-called control group that is not within project influences.

Three alternatives are (1) using the first measurement as the starting point, even if it is after your intervention has started; (2) use a rolling baseline wherein you collect information of a site or group only when you start working there or with them, and (3) making optimal use of existing documentation to develop an overview of the situation.

Information for managing project operations is just as important for overall performance as information about achieving the project strategy. Operational information monitoring tends to be straightforward for most projects, partly because physical and financial monitoring involves simple counting.

To explain progress – and not just measure how much of something occurred – you can:

- Monitor the quality of the implementation in process;
- Use qualitative methods that asks people about their opinions on the process;
- Keep up to date on the operating environment.

Baseline

Monitoring involves repeated assessment of a situation over time. Having an initial basis for comparison helps you assess what has changed over a period of time and if this is a result of the project's presence. So you must have information about the initial starting point or situation before any intervention has taken place. This information is what is commonly known as the "baseline" of information. It is the line of the base conditions against which comparisons are made later on.

More projects have great difficulty with baselines. Few projects have one that is useful for judging change. Some common problems with baselines studies are that they are made late or not at all, are excessively detailed or too general and irrelevant, have a sample that is too large and is beyond the analytical capacity of the project or implementing partners, do not include a control group, contain data on farmers that are not within the primary target group, etc. Often baselines cannot fulfil their prime purpose of facilitating evaluations so are rarely used during impact assessments.

Even if you do not use a baseline, you will need to find some form of comparison to know what the project has achieved. Where baseline information is inadequate, most projects initiate a data collection effort as soon as they decide what their objectives are, and the indicators to measure progress toward these. The first set of data collected on these indicators becomes, in effect, the formal baseline against which targets are set and future progress assessed.

The most streamlined baseline studies are objective driven – they only measure the status of focal aspects of the project. This means they are best if designed after the project logframe.

Keep in mind the following when developing a baseline:

- Only collect what you are going to use

- Plan baselines like you would any survey

- Keep it feasible. A baseline will never be perfect – it will always be a case of "good enough"

- Be creative with methods. The methods for collecting monitoring data are the same for baseline studies. In fact, they should be the same to make the data comparable.

- Don't forget poverty and gender issues in baseline studies.

The most important aspect of the baseline is using it. Otherwise it is a waste of time. To use baselines actively:

- Know when you need to conduct the next round of data collection and who is responsible for it;

- Budget adequately for all subsequent rounds of data collection you require to make regular comparisons;

- When a second dataset is available, plan a moment with those for whom the data are relevant to compare information, analyse the findings and agree on corrective actions, if necessary.

Alternatives to standard baselines studies

Many projects find baselines difficult to undertake well on time. Not surprisingly, the use of baselines is being increasingly questioned. A few alternatives to the standard survey approach to baselines are emerging.

1. First measurements as a starting point. One alternative is by indicating whether there is an improvement or a decline from the first measurement or in comparison to a desired condition. Use the first year of monitoring as a baseline.

2. Rolling baseline of profiles. This involves collecting baseline information to develop profiles not at once, but on a rolling basis.

Optimal use of existing documentation. Yet others solve the baseline problem by working on a description of the original situation that does not require field data collection but is based on existing documentation.

What are methods?

A method is an established and systematic way carrying out a particular task.

M&E makes use of a wide range of methods for gathering, analysing, storing and presenting information. Sometimes the information you require will make it necessary to adapt an existing methods or develop an entirely new method.

In carrying out M&E, it is often necessary to combine a series of methods. The combination of a series of methods in a structured way is often referred to as a methodology. For example, you have a methodology for a workshop or a methodology for baseline survey.

M&E grouped as follows:

- Sampling methods;
- Core M&E methods (such as stakeholder analysis and questionnaires);
- Discussion methods for groups (such as brainstorming and role play);
- Methods for spatially-distributed information (such as maps and transects);
- Methods for time-based patterns of change (such as diaries and photographs);
- Methods for analysing relationships and linkages (such as impact flow diagrams and problem trees);
- Methods for ranking and prioritising (such as matrices).

Considerations when choosing your method

Before choosing your method, be clear about three methodological aspects:

1. The difference and overlap between methods for qualitative and quantitative information;
2. The implications of working with individuals or group-based methods;
3. What makes a method participatory – or not.

The following checklist may assist you in the selection of your methods.

- Check that you completely clear about what information you need collected, collated analysed or fed back, for which you are seeking a method.

- Check that another group, person or organization is not already collecting the data. Check, where possible, how the information was collected to see if it is reliable enough for your needs.

- Be clear about how accurate you need to be.

- Does the information relate to a specialist area? If so, seek specialist advice or documentation before dealing with the method selection.

- Be clear about the tasks that need to be accomplished, and whether this concerns qualitative and/or quantitative information. Consider whether a method is needed to collect, collate, analyse, synthesise or disseminate information.

- Decide the extent to which the data gathering or analysis process is to be participatory and therefore whether you need to work with individuals, groups or a combination.

- Decide if your data-collection coverage is to be sampled or comprehensive. If working with a sample, decide on your sample size, clarify the "sample frame" and select your sample.

- Do you have several methodology options or is there only one? List your method options and make an initial selection. If using a sequence of methods, check that the methods complement each other.

- List methods and make an initial selection.

- When you think you've got the right method for the task at hand, consider at hand, consider if it is: feasible, appropriate, valid, reliable, relevant, sensitive, cost effective and timely.

- Pre-test your method, with a small number of participants who are similar to those from whom information is going to be sought. Adjust your methods based on recommendations for the test run.

- Determine the frequency of use.

Selecting your method

To select the most appropriate methods for the task at hand, the steps below give some guidance:

- Be clear about what you need to know.
- Check that another group, person or organization is not already collecting the data.
- Be clear how accurate you need to be.
- Does the information relate to a specialist area?
- Be clear about the task that needs to be accomplished and whether it concerns qualitative and or quantitative information.
- Decide the extent to which the data gathering or analysing process is to be participatory and, therefore, whether you need to work with individuals, groups or a combination.
- Decide if your data collection coverage is to be sampled or comprehensive. If working with a sample, decide upon you sample side and then choose and appropriate sampling method.

Quantitative and Qualitative methods

Quantitative methods directly measure the status or change of a specific variable, for example, change in crop yield, kilometres of road built or hours women spend fetching water. Quantitative methods provide direct numerical results.

Qualitative methods gather information by asking people to explain what they have observed, do, believe or feel. The output from qualitative methods is textual descriptions.

Much information in M&E reports tends to be based on numbers. Quantitative data are clear and precise and are often considered to be more scientifically verifiable. You will always need this kind of information. However, for some performance questions you will need to complement it by asking people about their experience and opinions.

Choosing to use a method to produce or analyse qualitative or quantitative data depends not only on the type of information you are seeking but also on the capacities and resources you have available, how the information will be used and how precise data need to be.

Note that the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is not absolute. Much qualitative information can be quantified. For example, opinions can be clustered into groups and then counted, thereby becoming quantitative. Note however, that you can never make quantitative information more qualitative. You cannot extract an opinion from a number.

Examples of monitoring methods

Methods are often formal research activities. But remember, they can also be activities that you design for a specific purpose, such as competitions, message boards etc. formal methods may include the following.

Method	Description
Stakeholder Analysis	Identifies participants and information to be included in M&E.
Documentation Review	Helps to track and understand the evolution of a project. It can help establish a baseline, or information on a specific indicator.
Biophysical measurements	Used to measure physical changes over time related to a specific indicator. It provides reliable, statistically verifiable data.
Direct Observation	Used to obtain useful and timely information by observing what people do. This often complements statistical data.
Cost-Benefit Analysis	Used to analyse and enumerate the range of benefits and costs surrounding a decision. Comparisons are often made within a project, or with other projects to determine efficiency.
Surveys and Questionnaires	Used to gain data from a large number of people in a structured way. The data derived from surveys often require statistical analysis.
Semi-Structured Interviews	Used to gain information from an individual or small group, using a series of broad questions to guide conversations. These allow for building an in-depth understanding of issues.
Case Studies	Used to document the sequence of events, or story related to a person, location, group or any other unit of investigation. This provides useful information into impact.

Focus groups	Used to collect general information, clarify details or gather opinions on issues. This is useful to build consensus and validate data in a group.
Group Ranking	Used to generate ideas and consensus from a group in developing a ranked list of problems, issues or actions. It often is used to complement other methods.
Mapping	Used to generate information on areas, resources, or social relationships. These are often useful visual data methods that can generate primary data.
Timeline data	These are used to generate data over time, through using journals, diaries, trend analyses, seasonal calendars etc. The data generated gives useful trend data, rather than static pictures.

Sampling

A number of the methods may require sampling, which is the selection of representative or relevant participants in the monitoring exercise. The sample is representative of the characteristics of a larger group, or population. There are three considerations when planning your sample:

- Your sample characteristic: What is it, or who is it, you would want to study in the larger group? The sample should contain representatives of this group;

- Your sample size: The sample size must be considered valid in terms of the larger group, or population. This is affected by many issues, but most importantly your budget! Sample size or error can be calculated statistically;

- Your sampling method: Samples can be selected through either random, or non-random (or selective) sampling, depending on the data needed, or the practicality of a given situation.

Essentially, the selection of the sample needs to consider issues of practicality, representivity, and the risk of bias. Remember too, that in project monitoring the participants are often key stakeholders, such as the target group, and the risk of bias may be increased due to existing project relationships.

Necessary conditions and capacities

In the appraisal report, you will find an indicative budget for M&E and a description of how M&E should or could be organised. But getting the M&E

system working also means thinking of appropriate incentives, ensuring you have the right and enough human capacity at hand and thinking about ways of storing and sharing information.

Discuss appropriate organisational structures for M&E at start-up. This is critical to success – or failure – of M&E. Overall, experiences from many projects suggest that M&E is much more effective when those implementing M&E are part of project operations and decision makers.

The detailed M&E plan may be part of the project implementation manual, an annex to it or a separate document. Irrespective of where it can be found, the implementation guidelines and M&E guidelines must be closely linked and above all coordinated.

As the detailed M&E plans may contain an overwhelming degree of detail, summaries for all project participants are helpful to keep everyone focused on their responsibilities. A good way to summarise specific inputs is an M&E timeline for everyone who plays an important M&E role. Ideally these timelines should be integrated within weekly and monthly activity timelines so that M&E becomes an integrated part of activities.

A documented plan is critical for keeping tract of activities and resources. The operational plan for project M&E provides the conceptual and, above all, practical basis for planning, monitoring and evaluation within the project. Remember, the M&E operational plan will be the reference point for stakeholder throughout the project life!

Once you have a detailed M&E system, two more steps are needed. First, you need to check the overall quality of the system itself, as designed. Second, you need to keep updating it to accommodate changing information needs, skills levels and contexts as well as the refinements in projects strategies and activities.

The standard criteria for assessing the quality of your M&E are:

- ***Utility*** – the M&E system will serve the practical information needs of intended users.

- ***Feasibility*** - the methods, sequences, timing and processing procedures proposed are realistic, prudent and cost effective;

- ***Propriety*** - the M&E activities will be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard for the welfare of those affected by its results.

- ***Accuracy*** – the M&E outputs will reveal and convey technically adequate information.

These can also be used when updating the M&E system.

Communication and reporting

The appraisal report will usually specify the expected reporting schedule, indicating who should receive a report and when. Often these will be reports for the funding agencies for accountability reasons. However, you also need to communicate M&E findings to many other stakeholders and for different reasons.

During start-up develop a detailed idea of your communication strategy. Include not only formal reports but also communication efforts that seek feedback about interim findings, and discuss what actions are needed.

Section 4

Implementing M&E

Learning Outcomes for this Section

- Key Issues in Implementation of M&E
- Building a reflective cycle in projects

Information gathering and organising

Data are the raw material that has no meaning yet. Information involves adding meaning by synthesising and analysing it. Knowledge emerges when the information is related back to a concrete situation in order to establish explanation and lessons for decisions.

For each information need or indicator, you must establish how the information will be collected and organised. Monitoring progress is relatively straightforward. Monitoring the impact requires a different method. Not only will each indicator require choosing a different method, but also each indicator or information need will usually present several options. Each method has specified advantages and disadvantages in terms of cost, reliability of data, skill needed, ability to quantify results and richness of information generated.

Particularly critical at the moment of method selection is knowing who will be involved in collecting, compiling and analysing. The more that the intended users of the methods can be involved in selecting or developing the methods; the more change there is that they will understand them and use them correctly. If methods are selected by someone not using them, then training users in the methods will be essential.

Gathering data is one thing. But eAch bit of information also needs to be collated, perhaps suMmarised and certaInly analysed by the right people. This will need to be planned in detail at start up. Project field staff are often only involved as data collectors and primary stakeholders only s data providers. Seeing monitoring as a learning process implies that analysis and agreeing on actions are undertaken with all levels in the project hierarchy and with partners. As a general rule, da4a collection and analysis should be undertaken with those to whom the data, analysis and decisions pertain and therefore, at the relevant level.

Participation and M&E

It is the people involved in a development intervention who will make it succeed or fail. Their participation in learning how to improve a project throughout its existence is fundamental. For project and partner staff, this means listening carefully and regularly to the views of different groups – including each other – about what is working and what is not, and hearing reasons for why problems exist and what needs to improve. Learning certainly requires more than only "listening". Opportunities need to be created for staff from the project and implementing partners and primary stakeholders to meet and analyse their experiences with the

project. A good M&E system provides and communicates data to help stakeholders groups analyse.

Options for verifying data

Every project needs its own way to incorporate verification into its data-collection process.

Triangulation is an important method for checking data. This means collecting the same type of information but from different sources and using different methods. This can be simple as, for example, asking the same question with different focus groups or comparing the outputs of a map and a transect of the same area. Typically, a simple triangulated method involves the knowledge and experience of the reviewer, the input from the review participant, and documentary information.

Verifying quantitative data is often more straightforward, as more agreed standards exist. These involve statistical checks and validation exercises, in order to confirm the consistency of results.

How to collate information

Collation of information requires an appropriate format. With some methods, this is very straightforward process, although the collation of qualitative data often requires special care and analytical skills.

Analysing M&E findings requires looking closely at the information (ideas, facts, impressions), clarifying and structuring it, understanding connections and identifying core elements, in order to arrive at conclusion that can lead to action. Analysing M&E findings has several functions:

- To refine understanding – by discussing initial information with project stakeholders, more refined insights can emerge;

- To limit biases – ensuring a thorough discussion about information means that this is cross checked and people can point out when they feel an issue has been represented incorrectly;

- To build a clear picture of a situation/event/process and reach consensus – by discussing data, contradiction and gaps can be identified and can be understood or filled;

- In participatory M&E joint analysis can strengthen ownership of the conclusions and motivate people to invest more in making changes happen.

Consider who will undertake analysis, and who is to be involved. Choosing a method for analysis depends on various factors, including whether it will be participatory process, the tool you use collate and analyse the data (e.g. a computer), and the type of information that is being collected.

Storing M&E information

Documentary information is critical for M&E providing the basis for communication, transparency, consensus building, and continuity of consultative processes. Stored information serves as the source of institutional memory turned to by newcomers and when verification or comparison with the past is needed.

- ***What information needs to be stored?*** – Think about what information and how much you need to store. Information storage is needed at two levels: to guide the project strategy and for tracking operations. In principle everything you decide to monitor and evaluate will need to be stored in some way.

- ***Who needs to access the information and when?*** – How the data are stored depends on who is to have access to the information and how often. Information to guide the project strategy is critical for managers (project staff and implementing partners), steering committees, primary stakeholder representatives and funding agencies. Information on operations is critical for field workers, managers of project component and primary stakeholders.

- ***What type of information needs to be stored?*** – hard copies or data that can be computerised and accessed centrally? – The more people that need the information the better it is to computerise it.

Regularly assess what information you need to keep and what can be discarded. A data storage system will soon get congested and overflow if it is not updated regularly!

Responsibilities

M&E is part of every single person's job, from the messenger to the project director. Monitoring is a daily and spontaneous activity. Yet it is important that M&E functions also have a clear position in the project structure, whether among project staff, with partners or among primary stakeholders.

To ensure clarity of M&E functions and tasks:

- Define the M&E responsibilities of implementing partners and primary stakeholders;
- Consider what staffing levels are appropriate for the set of M&E tasks and functions you need to fulfil;
- Allocate clear levels of authority to M&E related staff;
- Ensure overlap between project management and M&E;
- Use detailed job descriptions for each staff member to coordinate inputs.

Communication of M&E Results

M&E findings have many potential audiences: funding agencies, steering committees cooperating institution, project and implementing partner staff, and primary stakeholders. The main purpose of communicating findings is to ensure accountability and motivate stakeholders to action. Draft M&E findings can be then be passed to the relevant organization for accountability and action.

A key communication task is to ensure that your findings are correct. Workshops and meetings are critical events to seek feedback and plan action. When planning to present M&E information for feedback, consider these practical aspects:

- Ensure clarity message for specific audiences
- Agree on the frequency for communicating information.
- Agree on the frequency for communicating information.
- Ensure timeliness. When do you need to get feedback to still be useful for decision-making?
- Consider location. Where will people feel at ease?

Use different media to communicate findings – it is not often that "one message speaks to all". Written reporting is most well known and ranges form formal progress reports, to special studies, to informal briefs in the form of memorandums highlighting a current issue. But often M&E findings can be communicated more

effectively verbally than by other means. Speaking directly with target audiences provides a quicker and more flexible way to convey your message. Also use visual displays, such as graphs or charts showing trends or maps to convey summaries of what is happening.

Implementing a Learning System

The M&E planning section outlined the main critical reflection processes and events. Usually during start-up you need to plan such processes in detail – what will be focus, who will participate, will there by facilitated or self managed, how will one process feed into others etc – and schedule when they will occur.

Critical reflections can occur formally and informally. Formally, it can be facilitated during project meetings, workshops with partners and primary stakeholders or as part of external evaluations. Informally, it can occur in ongoing discussions between project stakeholders. Reflecting critically means questioning what is normally taken for granted, particularly project assumptions. This requires reflecting on what did not work or is not working.

Project M&E involves an extensive series of potentially reflective events – from weekly team meeting and informal sessions to the more formal supervision mission and mid-term reviews/evaluations. These events, whether self organised or externally initiated, occur alongside data gathering. During these events, project stakeholders can use the data gathered to indicate areas of improvement.

Learning does not happen in one sitting. It evolves, starting with individuals raising important issues and questioning assumptions through group based analyses that bring out different perspectives and information inputs. So you will need to plan "learning" as a series of events. Knowing how to structure the sequence is important. The optimally sequence of learning events follows reporting lines and hierarchies of decision-making.

An important moment in the learning sequences is when lessons are identified. Project and partner staff are continually learning, sometimes unconsciously and changing their everyday actions accordingly. Sometimes it is useful to systematise this learning in the form of "lessons learnt". A lesson learned can have an internal audience – the project and partner themselves – as well as an external audience consisting of other projects, other funding agencies.

Lessons for internal learning are particularly important when a project is innovative or form external learning after several years of implementation.

Making M&E events more reflective

Critical refection occurs in everyday planning, implementation and M&E activities. Each person involved in the project filters or changes information, prioritising and rejecting data continuously and often unconsciously. This happens in each informal chat, as well as during formal external mission.

Making a project reflective means planning more consciously when, and how to deal critically with the information. For instance, it is not necessarily appropriate for regular operational staff meetings to critically discuss aspects of the project – this may become counter-productive as project staff may lose motivation to contribute. However, the critical contribution of the project team to overall success makes it worthwhile to invest in team meetings as an important opportunity for reflection ***in a constructive environment*** – where issues can be discussed at length. To make project meetings reflective, consider how to prepare for them, conduct them and follow them up.

Using steering groups for reflection

Most projects use steering committees of some sort to provide strategic guidance. Of primary importance in the establishment of the steering committee is to define the clear extent – and limits – of responsibility. Once this is clear and agreed, and this can occur as part of project formulation, then the committee's composition and frequency of meetings can be decided.

To use steering committees as learning opportunities, use the meetings to assess dilemmas and problems and find solutions – rather than to report progress, as progress can be shared in documents beforehand. You might want to invite steering group members to visit the field at several moments during the project life and interact with field staff and primary stakeholders.

Annual project review

In the PCM approach to development, external project reviews are a standard method of assessing progress. However, internal annual reviews are also important for reflection. The overall purpose of the annual project review is to reach conclusion about achievements and failures in order to improve ongoing programme quality, and to share these conclusions. An annual project review can also help to:

- Ensure the overall project goals, results and implementation strategy remain appropriate;
- Assess progress towards planning impacts;
- Review implementation to date and analyse reasons for any deviations;
- Review the operational and management effectiveness and efficiency of implementation;
- Identify lessons and actions to improve next year's implementation and performance.

Responding to unplanned needs and request for information

So far, M&E has been discussed as if it were a process that can be planned entirely ahead of time. However, most project M&E units will often receive sudden demands from the project manager, ministries, steering committees and funding agencies to provide a report on a specific issue, or some other type of information. When developing the budget include a budget line for unplanned costs, say 10% contingency allocation.

Key steps in setting up the M&E system

1. Establish the purpose and the scope – why do we need M&E and how comprehensive should our M&E system be?
2. Identifying performance question questions, information needs and indicators – what do we need to know to monitor and evaluate the project in order to manage it well?
3. Planning information gathering and organization – how will the required information be gathered and organised?
4. Planning critical reflection processes and events – how will we make sense of the information gathered and use it to make improvements?
5. Planning for quality communication and reporting – how and to whom do we want to communicate what in terms of our project activities and processes?

6. Planning for the necessary conditions and capacities – what is needed to ensure our M&E system actually works?

Looking for the unintended

An important lesson from development projects is that effects may be generated that are unintended. It is extremely important for a monitoring system to identify these, and analyse them as crucial parts of the development process. You can track the unexpected through more regular reflections. When deciding what to track you cannot anticipate the unknown, but you can plan time to reflect on the unexpected. Ask yourself, "What happened with respect to this project activity / relationship / output / component that we did not expect?" to work through this, the project should address the questions:

- What happened since we last met that was unexpected?
- How as it different form what we expected?
- What are the implications of the unexpected for our work (e.g. for a specific activity, a relationship with another organization or a specific project output)?

Section 5

External Project Reflection: Evaluations

Learning Outcomes for this Section

- Understanding the purpose and process of external reviews and evaluations
- Understanding the purpose and processes of the Mid-Term Review and the End-of-Term Review
- Understanding the criteria used in evaluations

External Reflection Exercises

In addition to internal project reflection activities and processes, development projects also require external reflection processes. These provide the opportunity for formalised assessment and information gathering by those who are not directly engaged in the Project, in order to elicit an "objective" position, or to solicit expert opinion on the project. Most projects deal with the following types of external events:

- *Supervision missions* – annual, sometimes with one follow-up visit after six months.
- *Mid-term reviews and / or evaluations* – halfway through the project's lifetime;
- *Interim evaluations* – prior to completion to draw out key lessons and prepare a possible second phase;
- *End of Project*, or *Completion evaluation* – after project closure.

When external reviews or evaluations work well, project stakeholders will feel that the external reviewers have:

- Provided independent and constructive criticisms that helps them reflect on and identify lessons learned that can only improve action;
- Given a fair judgement of project progress and areas that needs improvement;
- Helped identify priorities for the remaining time of the project to support the rational use of resources (both human and material);
- Help unite diverse stakeholder perspective.

Evaluations

An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and Results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors.

Evaluation differs from monitoring in three respects:

- Timing
- Focus
- Level of Detail

Monitoring and evaluations are interactive and mutually supportive processes.

Types of Evaluation

An evaluation can be done during implementation ("mid-term"), at its end ("final evaluation") or afterwards ("ex post evaluation"), either to help steer the project or to draw lessons for future projects and programming. A typical evaluation is conducted by a team appointed by the donor agency, and is conducted in the form of a "mission" that would last several weeks. Evaluations can therefore take place at the following points in the project cycle:

When the project is still under way, and such interim evaluations are usually under-taken at mid-term (*mid-term evaluation or review*), to review progress and propose alterations to project design during the remaining period of implementation.

At the end of a project (*final or end-of-project evaluation*), to document the re-sources used, results and progress towards objectives. The objective is to generate lessons about the project, which can be used to improve future designs.

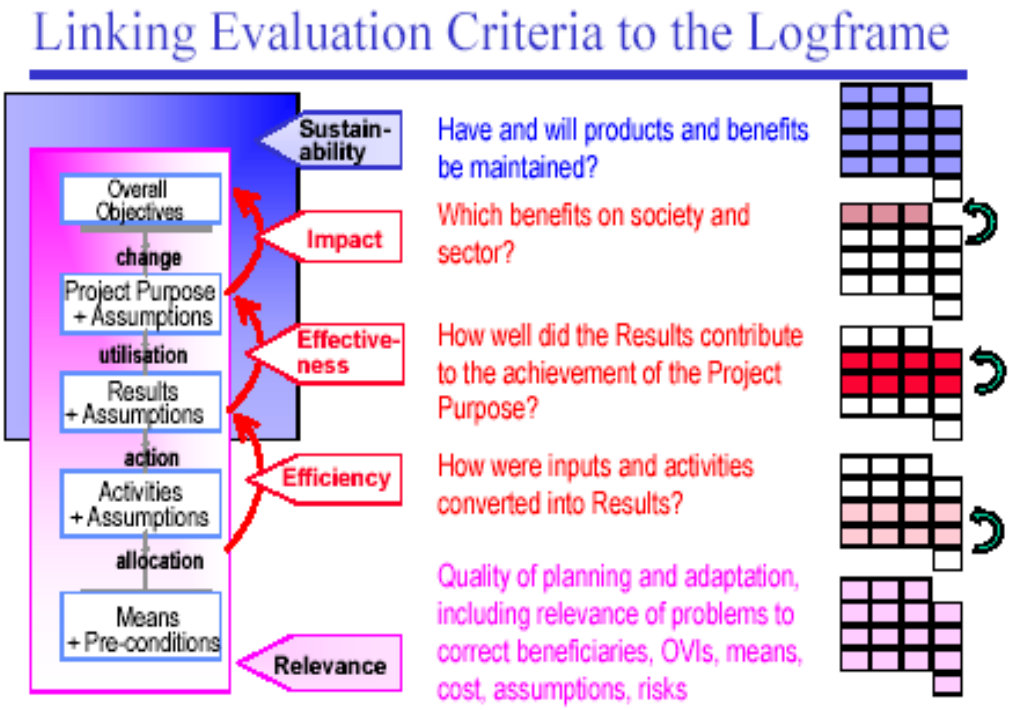
A number of years ***after completion of the project*** (*ex post evaluation*), often focusing on assessing the impact of development projects, which take place some period after its completion.

Criteria for Evaluation in Logical Framework

Given the integrated nature of logical framework, it is to be expected that the evaluation framework is closely linked to the Project Logframe. In fact, the Logframe establishes the basis on which the project will be evaluated. In essence there are five key criteria used during project evaluations:

- ☞ Relevance

- Impact
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Sustainability



Preparing for Evaluations

External reflection processes are you project's opportunity to provide important information on your progress and impact. They are useful exercises, but they also need to be managed well, or else you may face potentially damaging outcomes! In order to prepare well for an external review, or evaluation, you will need to do the following:

1. Discuss with implementing partners staff and primary stakeholder representatives how they would like to see the external review takes place.

2. Stipulate important aspects such as: the methodology to be used by the external team, how the feedback and response process with project stakeholders will be, the types of information the team will need form different stakeholder and will be involved.

3. Be clear about what the external teams expects the project stakeholders to prepare in terms of information and field visits.

4. Gather all relevant information about the project as agreed.

5. Once the TOR are defined, inform all stakeholders – on time - about the review dates and methodology. Define what this means for them in terms of expected input and potential implications.

During the evaluation it is important for you to be open and honest with the reviewers, and to maintain communication with them. It is always very useful to engage reviewers in an ongoing discussion on key issues or problem areas in the project, in order to enhance their own understanding and yours. Always try to build in a reflective feedback session, or sessions, where these ideas can be discussed more formally in a forum. It is also important to ensure that there is room for comment on a report before it is finalised.

Section 6

Selected Glossary

Term	Description
Activity	Actions taken or work performed in a project to produce specific outputs (which contribute to results) by using inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources.
Appraisal	Assessment, in accordance with established decision criteria, of the feasibility and acceptability of a project or programme prior to a funding commitment.
Assessment	A process of gathering information, analysing it, then making a judgement on the basis of the information.
Attribution	The causal link of one thing to another, i.e. changes that can be linked to a specific intervention in view of the effects of other interventions or confounding factors.
Baseline information	Information – usually consisting of facts and figures collected at the initial stages of a project – that provides a basis for measuring progress in achieving project objectives and outputs.
Cost-benefit analysis (CBA)	The comparison of investment and operating costs with the direct benefits or impact generated by the investment in a given intervention. It uses a variety of methods and means of expressing results.
Critical reflection	Questioning and analysing experiences, observations, theories, beliefs and/or assumptions.
Evaluation	A systematic examination of a planned, ongoing or completed project. It aims to answer specific management questions and to judge the overall value of an endeavour and supply lessons learned to improve future actions, planning and decision-making. Evaluations commonly seek to determine the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and the relevance of the project or organisation's objectives.
Formative evaluation	Evaluation conducted during implementation to improve performance. It is intended for managers and direct supporters of a project.
Impact	The changes in the lives of people, as perceived by

	them and their partners at the time of evaluation, plus sustainability enhancing change in their environment to which the project has contributed. Changes can be positive or negative, intended or unintended.
Impact assessment	The process of assessing the impact of a programme in an intervention area.
Indicator	Quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable basis for assessing achievement, change or performance. A unit of information measured over time that can help show changes in a specific condition.
Means of verification	The expected source(s) of information that can help answer the performance question or indicators.
Mid-term review (MTR)	A review undertaken at the mid-point of the project lifespan. Typically, this review will focus on issues of how well the project is functioning, rather than the impact it has made. The findings are used to redesign the project within the project cycle.
Monitoring	The regular collection and analysis of information to assist timely decision-making ensure accountability and provide the basis for evaluation and learning. It is a continuing function that uses methodical collection of data to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing project or programme with early indications of progress and achievement of objectives.
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	The combination of monitoring and evaluation which together provide the knowledge required for: a) effective project management and b) reporting and accountability responsibilities.
M&E framework	An overview of the M&E system developed during the design phase of a project and included in the project appraisal report.
M&E matrix	A table describing the performance questions, information gathering requirements (including indicators), reflection and review events with stakeholders, and resources and activities required to implement a functional M&E system.

Performance question	A question that helps guide the information seeking and analysis process, to help understand whether the project is performing as planned or, if not, why not.
Process evaluation	An evaluation aimed at describing and understanding the internal dynamics and relationships of a project, programme or institution.
Project	An intervention that consists of a set of planned, interrelated activities designed to achieve defined objectives within a given budget and a specified period of time.
Proxy indicator	An appropriate indicator that is used to represent a less easily measurable one.
Qualitative	Something that is not summarised in numerical form. Qualitative data normally describe people's knowledge, attitudes or behaviours.
Quantitative	Something measured or measurable by, or concerned with, quantity and expressed in numbers or quantities.
Review	An assessment of the performance of a project or programme, periodically or on an as-needed basis. A review is more extensive than monitoring, but less so than evaluation.
Sample	The selection of a representative part of a population in order to determine parameters or characteristics of the whole population.
Triangulation	Use of a variety of sources, methods or field team members to cross check and validate data and information to limit biases.
Validation	The process of crosschecking to ensure that the data obtained from one monitoring method are confirmed by the data obtained from a different method.