M&E PLANS

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Good planning is often the most essential part of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. The purpose of an M&E plan is to encourage project or programme staff to clarify what M&E tasks they intend to carry out, and why, before a project or programme begins, or near to the start. An M&E plan also ensures that these decisions are adequately documented.

Details of how monitoring and evaluation (M&E) will be carried out within a project or programme should be written up at the earliest possible time. Sometimes an overview of M&E forms part of a project or programme plan. Often, however, there is a need to provide greater detail. This is captured in an M&E plan. An M&E plan should enhance understanding amongst different stakeholders of the tasks ahead, and should also alert planners to the time and resources required for proper monitoring and evaluation work (Taylor 2001).

There is no set process for developing an M&E plan. Good practice suggests as wide an engagement with different stakeholders as possible. Certainly, anyone expected to carry out the work contained in the plan should be informed or consulted during its development.

Timing may also vary. If a project or programme is based on a logical framework or similar planning tool it may make sense to develop the M&E plan after this has been finalised. This is partly because a well-developed planning tool often supplies a lot of the information that should be contained in an M&E plan. But it might also be wise to wait until after project or programme funding has been approved before devoting too much time to an M&E plan. For this reason, M&E plans are often developed during the start-up phase of a project or programme.

As with any plan, it is important that an M&E plan is reviewed from time to time to ensure it remains relevant. Changes might need to be made because M&E systems or processes are not working properly, or because the project or programme itself has changed, and the M&E approach needs to be altered as a result.

Types of M&E plan

There are two types of M&E plan that are commonly in use amongst CSOs. The first is a plan for collecting indicators, and the second is a wider plan designed to look at broader aspects of M&E. The narrower indicator plan is designed to ensure that firm plans are in place to collect the indicators defined in a project or programme plan. This kind of M&E plan is often shown as a grid, with a different indicator on each line (see example below). The information contained in the grid may cover some of the following:

- the relevant output or objective;
- the indicator;
- the source of information used to collect the indicator;
- the person responsible for collection;
- when the indicator should be collected; and
- how often the indicator should be collected.

Some indicator grids also include columns designed to show any disaggregation required (e.g. gender). Others include columns for baselines, milestones and targets and/or contain information showing who analyses the information, and how, as well as who collects it.

The second type of M&E plan is a much wider plan designed to cover all different aspects of M&E. This wider plan often incorporates an indicator plan such as the one below. However, it also covers issues around the analysis and use of information, reporting schedules, learning mechanisms, training, knowledge management and resources as well. Some common areas covered by M&E plans are shown on the following page.

A Typical Indicator Collection Plan

Objective	Indicator	Source	Who collects?	When?	How often?
To enhance the agricultural productivity of farmers in the Basin region	Percentage increase in yield of maize crops	Quantitative survey of farmers	M&E department	September (the end of the harvest season)	At baseline, mid-point and end of project
	Farmers' use of new technologies	Focus group discussions with farmers	Project extension workers	During project reviews	Six-monthly
	Engagement of government officials with local farmer groups	Discussions with local government officials	Evaluation team	During final evaluation	Once

M&E Plan

Overview: A covering note describing who was involved in producing the M&E plan and how, when it was developed, when it was last revised, and when it will next be reviewed. The overview could also cover any key principles that will guide the implementation of M&E. It should contain a statement of the main purpose of the outlined M&E activities (see Davies 2008).

Planning Tools: Which planning tools were used in the development of the plan that might affect M&E, e.g. a logical framework or Outcome Map.

Objectives: The main goals, objectives and outputs of the project or programme. If a logical framework (or similar) exists then the objectives should be copied over from that document.

Indicators: Indicators might also be copied over from a planning tool. An indicator grid (see previous page) might be included to show for each indicator who collects it, when, where and how. Some M&E plans also contain information on baselines, milestones and targets against each indicator. If it is intended to identify indicators during the course of the project or programme then an explanation of how this will happen should be included.

Baselines: An explanation of how baseline data will be collected (if at all), who will carry out the work, when, and which methodologies might be used. If the project or programme plans to use control or comparison groups the methodology or approach should also be described.

Tools of information collection and analysis: Any specific tools or methodologies used to collect and analyse information. Sometimes this will be included within an indicator grid.

Evaluation: Plans and schedules for external evaluations, impact assessment or research work, including the rationale and timing of such work and who will carry it out (if known). If particular methodologies are to be used then they should also be described. Major internal reviews might also be covered under this section.

Participation: An outline of the different stakeholders that will be involved in M&E and the extent of their involvement. This includes their role in collecting and analysing information and using that information for different purposes. Any specific information needs of key stakeholders should also be described.

Data analysis process: Any key processes or methods designed to analyse data. This could include details of who will carry out the work, which methodologies will be used, when and where.

Reports: A reporting schedule outlining which different reports will be produced over the course of the project or programme, including a summary of who they will be written for, when and how often.

Learning mechanisms: An outline of any learning tools or mechanisms that will be used within the project or programme, including brief accounts of how they might be conducted, who might be involved, and how any learning might be shared or used.

Knowledge management: Any details on how data will be stored, processed and shared within or outside the project or programme. This could include details of any systems or processes designed to facilitate information flows or feedback loops. This section might also include details on how the results of the project or programme will be fed back to the targeted beneficiaries.

Training: A training schedule for how different stakeholders – internal and external – might be trained over the course of the project. This could also include details on inductions for new staff, or a statement of training needs for project/programme M&E staff.

Resources: An outline of the resources required for implementation of the M&E plan. This could include a statement of costs in terms of money and staff time, and an outline of the needs of staff responsible for developing and maintaining the M&E plan.

Annexes: An M&E plan might also contain annexes containing more detailed information. These could include some of the following.

- An attached logframe (or equivalent)
- An indicator grid
- A report schedule
- An M&E training plan
- A budget
- An activity or Gannt chart, outlining key M&E activities to be carried out over the course of the project or programme

Further reading and resources

Further papers in this section deal with the development of an M&E approach, and the factors that might influence that approach.

Developing an M&E approach

Influences on the M&E approach

A short note by Rick Davies contains a useful guide covering what should be covered by an M&E plan. There is also a section on M&E plans in the IFAD Guide to M&E, section 4.3.

- *What Should be Found in an M&E Framework/Plan?* by Rick Davies, second Draft, Tuesday, 01 April 2008. This document is available from the www.mande.co.uk website.
- *A Guide for Project M&E*, by Irene Guijt and Jim Woodhill, produced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. This is available freely from the internet.

References

- Davies, R (2008). *What Should be Found in an M&E Framework/Plan? Second draft,* www.mande.co.uk (cached)
- Taylor, L (2001). *Good Monitoring and Evaluation: Guidance notes,* October 2001, PARC, IOD.

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INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.

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