M&E PLANS

Good planning is an important part of any monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach. An M&E plan is normally developed before a project or programme begins, or near to the start. The purpose is to clarify what M&E tasks project or programme staff intend to carry out, and why. An M&E plan also ensures that decisions over how to conduct M&E are properly documented.

Sometimes an overview of M&E is contained within a project or programme plan. Often, however, there is a need for a dedicated M&E plan, which provides greater detail of the M&E tasks project or programme staff intend to carry out. An M&E plan should enhance understanding amongst different stakeholders of the tasks ahead, and should also inform planners of the time and resources required for proper M&E work (Taylor, 2001).

There is no set process for developing an M&E plan. However, 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.

An M&E plan can be developed before a project or programme begins. However, if a project or programme is based on a logical framework or similar planning tool it makes sense to develop the M&E plan after this has been finalised. This is because a well-developed planning tool often supplies a lot of the information on which an M&E plan is based. It may also be wise to wait until after project or programme funding has been approved before devoting too much time to an M&E plan. Consequently, M&E plans are often developed during the start-up phase of a project or programme.

As with any plan, it is important to review an M&E plan regularly 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

Two types of M&E plan are commonly used by civil society organisations (CSOs). The first is designed to ensure that firm plans are in place to collect information about the indicators defined in a results framework or project/programme plan. This kind of M&E plan is often developed as a grid, with a different indicator on each line (see example below). The information contained in the grid usually covers the following:

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

Some indicator grids also include columns designed to identify any disaggregation required (e.g. gender). Others include columns for baselines, milestones and targets, and/or contain descriptions of how information on the different indicators might be analysed and used.

The second type of M&E plan is a 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 other issues such as stakeholder participation in M&E, reporting schedules, learning mechanisms, training requirements, knowledge management and resources. Some common areas covered by the second type of M&E plan are shown on the following page.

A Typical Indicator Collection Plan

Objective	Indicator	Source	Responsibility	When collected	Baseline
Enhanced agricultural productivity of farmers in the Central Basin	Number of farmers trained	Project records	Project M&E staff	Information recorded at the end of each training	Zero
	Percentage increase in wheat crop yields	Survey of a random sample of supported farmers	Project M&E staff	September (the end of the harvest season)	1.84 tonnes per hectare
	Adoption of new technologies by farmers	Focus group discussions with farmers	Agricultural extension workers	During six-monthly project reviews	N/A

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 (see Davies, 2008).

Purpose: The main purpose(s) of the proposed M&E activities.

Planning Tools: Details of any planning tools or methodologies used in the development of the project or programme plan that might affect M&E. This might include a results framework, e.g. a logical framework or outcome map. Sometimes, this section might also include details of any theory of change developed.

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

Indicators: Indicators might also be copied over from a results framework or project/programme plan. An indicator grid might be included to show who collects each indicator, when and how. Some M&E plans also contain information on baselines, milestones and targets, as well as how information will be analysed and used. If the intention is to identify indicators during the course of a project or programme then this should be explained.

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 intends to use control or comparison groups the methodology or approach should be described.

Tools of information collection and analysis: A description of the main methodologies used to collect and analyse information. Sometimes this information will be included within an indicator grid. If the project/programme intends to implement any sampling techniques or methodologies then these should also be explained.

Evaluation: Plans and schedules for external evaluations, impact assessments or research work, including the rationale and timing of such work and details of 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: 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 and 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 how any electronic databases or information technology (IT) systems will be designed and used. This section might also include details on how the results of the project or programme will be fed back to targeted groups or communities.

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

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

- An attached logical framework (or equivalent)
- An indicator grid (see previous page)
- 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

Many papers within the INTRAC M&E Universe deal with some of the different elements contained within an M&E plan. These include papers in the **Planning and M&E** section on subjects such as setting objectives, indicators and baselines. Another paper in the **Data Collection** section describes some of the basic tools used to collect M&E data. All of these papers can be accessed directly by clicking on the links below.

Setting objectives

Indicators

Baselines

Basic tools for data collection

The *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) project/programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guide* has a section on M&E plans, and provides a detailed example in annex 8 of the document. At time of writing, this is available from the IFRC.org website, at https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/IFRC-ME-Guide-8-2011.pdf. Copies of the guide can also be found in many other locations.

INTRAC has produced a concise guide to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), intended specifically for use by small non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Written by Anne Garbutt, the toolkit is one of five produced as part of the Strengthening Small Organisations with Big Ambitions project (2021-22), which aimed to strengthen small UK-based NGOs working in international development. However, it can be used by any small NGO looking to develop their MEL practices. The toolkit is available at https://www.intrac.org/resources/monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-a-toolkit-for-small-ngos/.

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, IOD PARC.

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INTRAC is a values-based, not-for-profit organisation with a mission to strengthen civil society organisations. Since 1991, INTRAC has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on monitoring and evaluation. Our approach to M&E is practical and founded on core principles. We encourage appropriate M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts, and we work with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs.

M&E Universe

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