

MONITORING

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WHAT IS MONITORING?

In brief, monitoring is the *collection and use of data* on the quality and amount of progress towards the achievement of planned results in projects and broader programming. Monitoring helps to identify successes and challenges to inform the strengthening of future activities.

Monitoring differs from evaluation as it tends to be continuous or carried out at short intervals of less than one year (usually every 3-6 months).

Evaluation is an exercise of limited duration and is usually conducted every two years or more. Evaluations aim to systematically and objectively assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency of the project / program in progress or completed.

WHY MONITOR?

There are many reasons to engage in monitoring. Some of the main reasons are to:¹

- Show transparency and accountability towards the attainment of results
- Track project progress against expected results
- Learn from experience and improve implementation of future actions of the project/programme
- Identify implementation challenges and find possible ways to address the challenges
- Identify good practices and lessons learned to share with others
- Build the overall knowledge base on the subject of the project/programme
- Strengthen the relationships between the stakeholders if the entire range of stakeholders participate actively in monitoring
- Provide information that may be used in advocacy to influence policy or to raise funds

WHAT ARE THE CORE COMPONENTS OF MONITORING?

Monitoring includes the:

- Identification of measures that can, as objectively as possible, answer questions about the extent and quality of progress
- Collection of data using various means such as surveys, focus group discussions, individual interviews, analysis of documents and reports, observations, measurement using technical tools (including weighing scales, calculators, various digital tools)
- Reporting of data to stakeholders which may include people such as community members,

¹ The Thematic Brief is based on a review of monitoring plans submitted to the Research Network Support Facility (RNSF) and on among several other sources: IFRC (2011). See references and IESF sources at end of document. Geneva: IFRC.

government, civil society, donors, wider public.

- Collection and inputs from stakeholders in response to monitoring
- Adjustment of the implementation of activities in line with monitoring information (as needed)

Monitoring should include at least the following elements:

- **Outputs**-immediate results such as number of trainings conducted and people trained, number of awareness sessions on gender issues, increase in number of savings and credit group members, number of (additional) people registered in a business association or cooperative. Outputs are usually quantitative but may be qualitative.
- **Outcomes**- these are the overall expected results that may occur as a result of the outputs. These include for example, increase in the incomes of project supported community members, decreases in harassment of market sellers, increases in number of women in elected leadership of registered business associations.
- **Means of verification**- description of how results will be measured (surveys, government data, interviews, etc.)
- **Indicators and their definitions**- the measure that specifies the level of achievement that must be obtained to determine if an output and/or outcome have been sufficiently achieved. Indicators must be valid (directly related to the output/outcome), reliable (will always lead to the same interpretation), ethical, simple, useful and affordable.
- **Frequency of the monitoring**- explanation of how frequently the data will be collected.
- **List the roles and responsibilities** of persons involved in different aspects of the monitoring process.

See the “References and IESF suggested resources” list below for details on where to access a template that can help to prepare a Monitoring Plan. Also see the RNSF Thematic Brief on Results-Based Monitoring for a brief discussion of the formulation of outcomes, outputs, indicators and means of verification

WHAT ARE COMMON TYPES OF MONITORING?

There are many ways in which monitoring can be implemented. Some ways are more participatory than others, some are more quantitative while others use more qualitative data. Most good monitoring systems use a combination of quantitative and qualitative monitoring. New methods are constantly being developed and tested.

Two main types of monitoring are:

Standard Monitoring- tracking indicators over the life of the projects by conducting surveys, focus group discussions, tracking records of meetings, legal and policy framework development. A description of a common standard way to monitor and evaluate projects can be found in the RNSF Thematic Brief cited in the reference list below.

Most Significant Change (MSC)- is a participatory method that involves project in deciding the type of measurement of results that will be done, how it will be recorded, and how it will be analysed². Stakeholders collect stories from the field that illustrate noteworthy significant change. A panel of stakeholders then select most significant of these stories, discuss them in-depth and interpret the value of the reported changes. The advantage of MSC is that it is highly participatory and helps focus attention on program impact.

MONITORING GOOD PRACTICES

1. Monitoring should be systematic, based upon predetermined indicators and assumptions.
2. Indicators should have very clear definitions so that it is evident what the terms used in the

² Davies, R. and Dart, J. (2005).

indicators actually mean. It is preferable to involve stakeholders, including implementing staff, in deciding on the definitions.

3. Data collection should be limited only to what is necessary to fully inform a project/programme. Collection of information that is simply “nice to know” should be avoided.
4. Date should be as accurate as possible with few errors and bias.
5. Data should be relevant and respond to users' real needs.
6. Data collection should be done at reasonable intervals, frequently enough to be useful but not so frequent that too many resources are spent on monitoring as opposed to implementing activities.
7. Monitoring needs to be timely, so information can be readily used to inform project/programme implementation.
8. Monitoring should also look for unanticipated changes with the project/ programme and its context, including any changes in project/programme assumptions/risks; this information should be used to adjust project/programme implementation plans.
9. Whenever possible, monitoring should be participatory, involving key stakeholders – this can not only reduce costs but can build understanding and ownership.
10. Report back to stakeholders in ways that they can understand.

LESSONS LEARNED: COMMON ERRORS IN MONITORING

When planning and carrying out monitoring exercises there are a number of common errors which should be *avoided*. These include:

1. Confusing outputs with outcomes.
2. Prioritising of data into necessary, useful and simply interesting not done.
3. Too many indicators are included, focus as much as possible on higher level indicators (overall) as opposed to detailed indicators.
4. Too much data collected that is not directly relevant and is time consuming to collect and analyse.
5. Data collection methods are too complex and not practical for use in real situations.
6. Indicator definitions are not clear or not really related to the outcome or output.
7. Lack of consideration of the actual ability of a project to influence results such as “number of laws/regulations/policies adopted” as an indicator since non-Government implementers often do not have control over the official adoption of laws and policies.
8. Lack of clarity with regard to *how* to collect field data.
9. Capacity of data collectors is insufficiently strengthened.
10. Cost of data collection and analysis is underestimated.
11. Lack of transparency towards external stakeholders, including potential evaluators who will review monitoring data.
12. Lack of using monitoring information to feed back into and improve the activities/project/programme. This is often a very weak area in monitoring.

ANALYSING MONITORING INFORMATION

Data analysis of monitoring information includes determining the frequency of specific answers, identifying trends, clusters or other relationships between different types of data. The analysis determines the level of performance against plans and targets. It should contribute to identifying good practices and lessons learned, anticipating potential future problems and identifying solutions decision-making and organizational learning forming conclusions.

Analysis of collected monitoring data can be participatory through directly involving the project participants as much as possible. When time and resources permit, this is ideal as project participants can provide contextual explanations for findings. Even when the Most Significant Change method is not used, involving stakeholders is important.

There are interesting examples and toolkits on how to involve project participants in the analysis of monitoring data. See IESF suggested resources below.

REFERENCES AND IESF SUGGESTED RESOURCES

AVSI (2015) Plan de Suivi Evaluation- Appui Autonomisation des Artisans de Côte d'Ivoire. Abidjan: AVSI

Davies, R. and Dart, J. (2005) The Most Significant Change Technique. A Guide to Its Use. CARE/OXFAM et al. Available from http://betterevaluation.org/resources/guides/most_significant_change and in the IESF Library at <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/iesf/document/%E2%80%98most-significant-change%E2%80%99-msc-technique-careoxfam-2005>

IFRC (2011). Project/programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guide. Geneva: IFRC. Available from <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/monitoring/IFRC-ME-Guide-8-2011.pdf> and in the IESF Library at <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/iesf/document/project-programme-monitoring-and-evaluation-guide-ifrc-2011>

McGowan, A. (2015) A. Results-based management (RBM) Thematic Brief. Available from <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/iesf/document/results-based-management>

Public Profit (2015). Dabbling in the Data: A Hands-on Guide to Participatory Data Analysis. Oakland, CA: Public Profit. www.publicprofit.net and in the IESF Library at <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/iesf/document/guide-easy-participatory-data-analysis-public-profit-2015>

Tools4Dev (2015). Monitoring and Evaluation Template. Available from <http://www.tools4dev.org/resources/monitoring-evaluation-plan-template/> and in the IESF Library at <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/iesf/document/monitoring-and-evaluation-plan-template-tools4dev-2015>

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