M&E Plans

Good planning is the most essential part of any M&E system. Many M&E systems fall into disuse because too little attention is given to detail at the planning stage. The purpose of an M&E plan is to encourage project or programme staff to think clearly about what they intend doing in the way of M&E before implementation of a project or programme begins, and to ensure those plans are adequately documented.

Details of how monitoring and evaluation will work within a project or programme should be written up at the earliest possible time. Sometimes an overview of M&E will form part of a project or programme plan. Often, however, there will be a need to provide greater detail, and this will be captured in an M&E plan. An M&E plan will not only enhance understanding amongst different stakeholders of the tasks ahead, but 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, and 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 uses a logical framework or similar planning tool it often makes sense to develop the M&E plan afterwards. This is partly because a well-developed planning tool might supply a great deal of the information 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 also 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. 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
- how often the indicator should be collected

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

Objective	*Indicator*	*Source*	*Who collects?*	*When?*	*How often?*
To enhance the agricultural productivity of farmers in the Basin region	*Average yield of maize crops*	*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*

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

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, and 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 Mapping.*

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 above) 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 for each indicator. If there is an intention to identify indicators during the course of a 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 groups the methodology or approach should also be described.*

Tools of information collection and analysis: *Any specific tools 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 approaches or 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 participation. This includes different stakeholders' involvement in designing the M&E plan, collecting and analysing information and using that information for different purposes. Any specific information needs of key stakeholders should also be described here.*

Data analysis process: *Any key processes or methods designed to analyse data. This could include 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, including brief accounts of how they might be conducted, who might be involved, and how any learning might be 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 proposed 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 maintainng 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 over the course of the project or programme*

M&E Plans

Further reading and resources

Further papers in this series deal with the development of an M&E approach, and the factors that might influence that approach. A short note by Rick Davies contains a useful guide for 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. Further information on evaluation frameworks and plans can be found at the Better Evaluation website at http://betterevaluation.org.

- *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 Gujit and Jim Woodhill, produced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. This is available freely from the internet at http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/index.htm.

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 specialist capacity building institution for organisations involved in international relief and development. Since 1992, 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.

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