

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is heavily dependent on good planning. If plans are properly developed at the start of a project or programme then M&E become much easier exercises to plan and implement. On the other hand it can be very difficult to monitor and evaluate a project that has not been properly planned to start with.

Before implementing a project or programme there will normally be a planning process. This planning process should be based on a thorough understanding of what the project or programme is setting out to accomplish. At the very least this should clarify:

- what activities will be carried out as part of the development intervention;
- what it is hoped will change as a result; and
- why that change is important.

Wherever possible it is important that M&E is considered at the planning stage, and not left to be discussed until after plans have begun to be implemented. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged amongst the M&E community that where M&E efforts fail it can usually be traced back to weaknesses in the planning process.

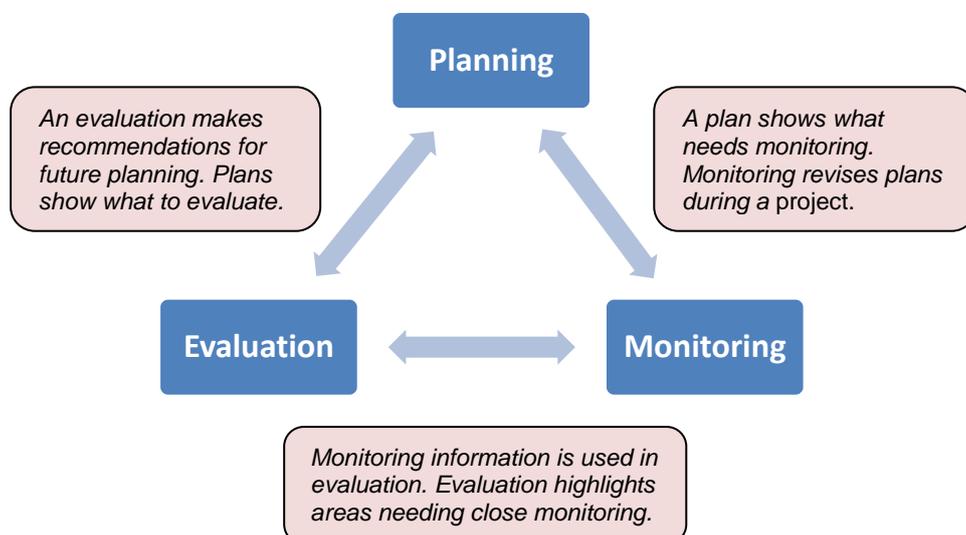
There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, in order to identify change it is important to know what the situation was before a project or programme was implemented. This is known as the baseline. Secondly, good planning allows for easier identification of objectives and indicators - the desired changes to which a project or programme hopes to contribute and the evidence that will help show whether those changes have happened. Thirdly, the design of the M&E process may help to identify gaps or weaknesses in the planning process itself, thereby helping to further refine plans. Lastly, if it is intended that different stakeholders, such as beneficiaries, be involved within

M&E processes then it is also important to ensure their involvement at the planning stage.

This does not mean that M&E will always be dominated by pre-planned objectives and indicators. On the contrary, most good M&E systems are designed to allow for the capture of unintended consequences, positive or negative, as well as intended ones. However, if M&E is not considered properly at the planning stage it may not even be possible to state which activities or resulting changes were intended and which were not!

It is important to note that it is still possible to carry out effective M&E after a project or programme has been identified and planned, even if M&E was not properly considered at the planning stage. Indeed, there are some M&E tools and techniques that are specifically designed to do this. However, it is harder and there may be fewer options. For example, it will not be easy to compare changes at the end of a project or programme with the situation at the start if those desired changes were not previously identified and a baseline carried out. In the worst case, all that may be possible is to list activities carried out, changes observed and lessons learned with no real idea of how they compared to what was considered feasible at the start.

Even after a project or programme has begun it is still important that planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) are closely linked and are not viewed in isolation (Bakewell et. al., 2003). This is shown in the diagram below.



Working clockwise, a plan should show what needs to be monitored. The monitoring information gathered throughout the project will then be used at the evaluation stage. In turn, an evaluation may lead to the revision of future plans - either in a new phase of the project or programme or in future projects or programmes. Working anti-clockwise, a plan will normally identify what needs to be evaluated, and an evaluation might pick up areas that need further close monitoring in the future. Monitoring also plays an essential role in identifying how plans need to be

revised throughout the lifetime of a project or programme.

INTRAC believes that, in an ideal world, each function of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) would be integrated, in turn affecting (and being affected by) the other functions. This is why organisations are so often encouraged to think of a PME System rather than just an M&E system.

Further reading and resources

The remainder of the papers in this series deal with different issues around M&E in relation to planning. The first few papers cover the development of plans, influences that affect the design and implementation of M&E approaches, and the development of M&E plans. Further papers deal with more specific issues such as setting objectives, indicators and baselines. There are also papers dealing with different approaches to planning and M&E such as results-based management, the logical framework and outcome mapping. The final paper covers theories of change, and how these are linked to both planning and M&E.

References

- Bakewell, O; Adams, J and Pratt, B (2003), *Sharpening the Development Process: A practical guide to monitoring and evaluation*. INTRAC, UK.

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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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