

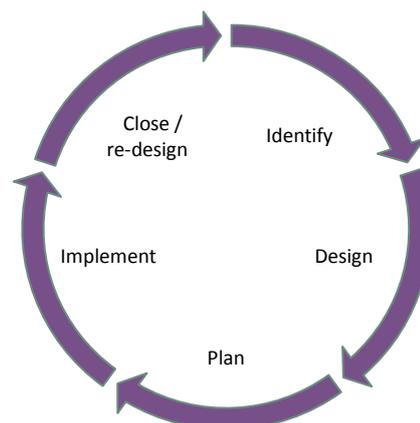
M&E FUNCTIONS

Monitoring and evaluation are different functions which are related to each other. They are widely known under the acronym of M&E. However, they are not the same, and they sometimes have different purposes and practices. There are many other functions related to M&E. Some come under the broad heading of M&E, whilst others interact with M&E to varying degrees, depending on circumstances.

There are many different functions related to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Some come under the broad heading of M&E, whilst others interact with M&E to varying degrees, depending on circumstances.

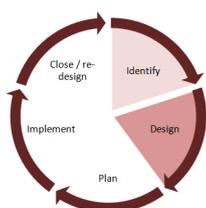
The different functions described in this paper, and in other M&E Universe papers, are carried out at different stages of the project / programme cycle. These stages are summarised in the diagram opposite. A project or programme is first identified and/or conceived. Then there is a design phase, following which a plan is developed. Next, the project or programme is implemented. After this it may be closed, extended, expanded or re-designed.

Not all projects or programmes follow the same cycle, and sometimes the different stages overlap or are carried out in a different order. For example, information acquired during planning or implementation may lead to a re-design of the project or programme. However, the diagram represents a simple model that can be used to show when different functions are usually carried out.

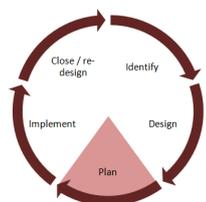


The section below describes different functions related to M&E. The diagrams show when they are most commonly used. The darker the shading, the more likely the function is to be used at that stage of the project / programme cycle. However, there are often exceptions to these rules.

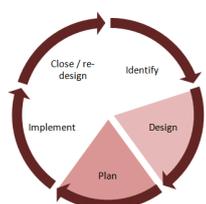
Different functions and their place within the project / programme cycle



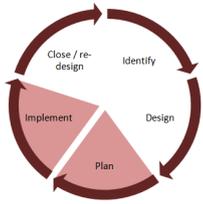
A **situation analysis** is an analysis of a situation within a geographic location or sector. It normally involves an assessment of the challenges in the location or sector, and an analysis of who is currently working on those challenges, what they are doing and what capacities they have. It also involves an assessment of the external socio-economic environment. A situational analysis is usually carried out during the design phase of a project or programme, and contributes to the planning phase. In some circumstances it may be used to help identify projects or programmes.



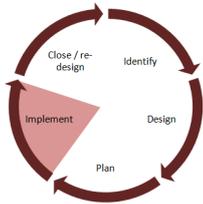
A **plan** is produced after a project or programme has been designed. A plan usually includes a written description of working approaches, goals, objectives, activities, indicators, budgets, etc. In straightforward projects plans often include pre-defined activities that are intended to achieve the desired objectives. In more complex situations plans are developed that recognise the need for flexibility throughout the period of the project or programme. M&E is often heavily based on planning, and may later lead to the adjustment of plans during implementation.



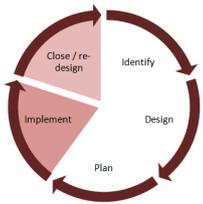
A formal **appraisal** is often done at the end of the design and planning phases, before permission is given for a project or programme to proceed. An appraisal critically reviews all aspects of a project or programme. It checks that the working approaches designed to achieve the goals and objectives are realistic, and that the project or programme is likely to be good value for money. An appraisal might also assess the relevance and/or feasibility of the project or programme. Sometimes appraisals can lead to further design or planning work being carried out.



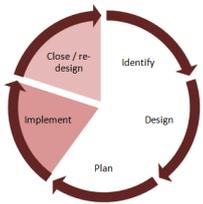
To understand the changes brought about by a project or programme, it is necessary to understand what the original situation was. This is known as the **baseline**. Baselines can range from simple, informal exercises to large, expensive surveys. They are an important part of many M&E systems. Baselines usually collect information on project or programme objectives and/or indicators. They are normally carried out at or near to the start of a project or programme, either at the end of the planning phase or at the beginning of the implementation phase.



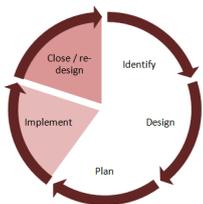
Monitoring is the systematic and continuous collection and analysis of information about the progress of a development intervention. Monitoring is done to ensure that the people who need to know about a development intervention are properly informed so that management decisions can be taken in a timely manner. Monitoring is conducted throughout the implementation of a project or programme. It often feeds into evaluations, and may also contribute to alterations in plans and budgets. Sometimes it can lead to the re-design of projects or programmes.



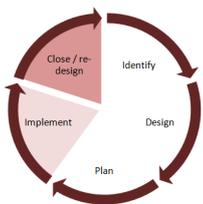
A **review** can take place at any time throughout a project or programme, and can focus on any aspect of the work. It is a very imprecise term that has different meanings in different circumstances. Most people use the term to refer to an exercise that is a bit less than an evaluation. A review can be regular or ad hoc, formal or informal, broad or narrow, internal or external, or any combination of these. Reviews are an integral part of many M&E systems. Some projects and programmes have a formal review at the end instead of an evaluation.



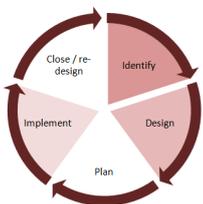
An **audit** is carried out to check that projects or programmes are complying with rules, regulations and procedures. Audits are often carried out on financial policies and practices. But they can also be carried out to review other processes such as risk management or compliance with government regulations. Audits are different from evaluations because they are concerned with compliance rather than performance. They are usually carried out during implementation, but can also be carried out at the end of a project or programme.



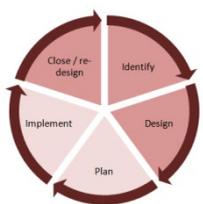
An **evaluation** is normally carried out at a significant time during a project or programme. This might be at the mid-point, at the end, or sometime afterwards. Evaluations may also be carried out when a project or programme is about to move into a new phase, or in response to a critical issue. Most CSO evaluations are carried out at the level of projects and programmes, although evaluations can also be carried out at country, region or sector level. The purpose of an evaluation is often to assess the performance of a project or programme against its objectives.



Impact assessment involves the systematic assessment of long-term and / or significant changes – positive or negative, planned or unplanned – brought about by a development intervention or series of interventions. Impact assessment is always focused on the impact of interventions, rather than on activities or outputs. Impact assessment may be carried out during the implementation of a project or programme, but it is most often carried out at the end, or even some time afterwards.



There are many occasions when **research** can be used within the project or programme cycle. Research is often conducted as part of the identification or design stage. Research may also be carried out alongside projects or programmes to better understand evolving contexts. In complex programmes, research may be commissioned to look more in-depth at an issue or generate findings that can then be used to improve the programme. Increasingly, large-scale or major evaluations and impact assessment studies are becoming indistinguishable from research.



A **Theory of Change** (ToC) approach to planning and evaluation is now considered an essential practice for many large organisations, programmes and projects. Most ToCs include a description of how change happens in a particular context, a description of the role an organisation and its partners play in contributing to change, and critical assumptions. A ToC may be developed before a project or programme starts, to feed into the design and planning phases. Theories of Change are also commonly used as frameworks for evaluation and impact assessment.

The difference between monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are different functions that are related to each other, and are widely known under the acronym of M&E. However, they are not the same, and they sometimes have different purposes and practices. The key differences, as outlined in the table below, are as follows: (see Bakewell et. al. 2003).

- Monitoring is normally carried out throughout a project or programme. Evaluations are carried out at certain times, for example at the end of a project or programme, or at the mid-point. All projects and programmes are monitored, but some are never formally evaluated.
- Monitoring tends to focus more on day-to-day activities, and is more concerned with the process of an intervention. Evaluation tends to focus more on progress towards objectives and goals.
- Monitoring is usually carried out by in-house project staff, and sometimes by beneficiaries as well. Evaluation may also involve these stakeholders, but is normally led by external evaluators or facilitators.
- Monitoring is conducted through the systematic collection, analysis, storage, sharing, reporting, communication and use of information on a regular and ongoing basis. Evaluation, on the other hand, often includes additional data collection exercises, such as large surveys.

	Monitoring	Evaluation
Timing	Continuous throughout a project	Periodic review at significant point – end, mid-point, end of phase etc.
Scope	Day to day activities; outputs; indicators of process and output	Progress towards objectives and goals; indicators of outcome and impact
Participants	Management, project staff, beneficiaries	External evaluators / facilitators, donors, management, project staff, beneficiaries
Process	Regular meetings, interviews, monthly / quarterly reviews	Extraordinary meetings, additional data collecting exercises
Written outputs	Regular reports and updates to donors, management and beneficiaries	Written report with recommendations for change, presented in workshops for different stakeholders

These rules are not universal, and there are often exceptions. It is sometimes more helpful to view traditional monitoring and evaluation as two opposite ends of a

spectrum, with a large amount of overlap. For example, project staff might decide to conduct a series of case studies on beneficiaries at regular intervals throughout the project's lifetime, in order to assess changes in their lives. This meets the criteria for monitoring as it is a continuous, on-going exercise, carried out by internal staff. On the other hand the exercise also seeks to assess the changes brought about by the project, and could therefore be understood as evaluation. In this case there is no clear distinction.

Although there are always exceptions, the differences between monitoring and evaluation outlined above nonetheless provide a useful summary that holds true in many straightforward projects and programmes.

Monitoring and evaluation in complex programmes and organisations

In large, complex programmes, and across whole organisations, the distinctions between monitoring and evaluation may begin to break down completely, and the categorisations above become unhelpful. For example, Oxfam GB carries out evaluations on a sample of its policy influencing projects every year, using a methodology adapted from process tracing. These evaluations clearly aim to uncover the changes brought about through Oxfam's work, and are often carried out by external evaluators. Yet they form part of an ongoing, systematic, organisational process. In these cases it is probably more helpful to categorise the work as part of an organisational M&E system, rather than worrying too much about whether it counts as monitoring or evaluation.

Equally, in complex programmes and organisations the clear distinctions between M&E and other functions such as impact assessment, research and review also begin to become blurred. For example:

- the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is a methodology designed to uncover stories of change through an ongoing systematic process that can be used for monitoring, review, evaluation or impact assessment;
- impact assessment is often conducted as part of an impact evaluation, but may also be carried out through ongoing impact monitoring; and
- many large evaluations and impact assessment studies use research methods and standards, and are often indistinguishable from large research studies.

In summary, it is helpful to understand the key differences between monitoring and evaluation in simple projects and programmes, and important to understand the different purposes and practices of each. But in complex programmes, and at organisational levels, the distinctions are not always as clear. In these cases a rigid adherence to the formal definitions may become unhelpful.

Further reading and resources

Many of the functions mentioned within this paper are described more fully in other papers in the M&E Universe. These can be accessed by clicking on the links below.



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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