

PLANNING AND M&E

Good monitoring and evaluation often depends on good planning. If plans are properly developed at the start of a project or programme then monitoring and evaluation are much easier tasks. On the other hand, it can be very difficult to monitor and evaluate a project or programme that was not properly planned at the beginning.

Before implementing a project or programme there is normally a planning process. This should be based on a thorough understanding of what the project or programme is setting out to accomplish. At the very least a plan 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 those changes are important.

Wherever possible it is important to consider monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at the planning stage, rather than waiting until after plans have begun to be implemented. Failures in project or programme M&E can often be traced back to weaknesses in the planning process, or a failure to address M&E at an early enough stage.

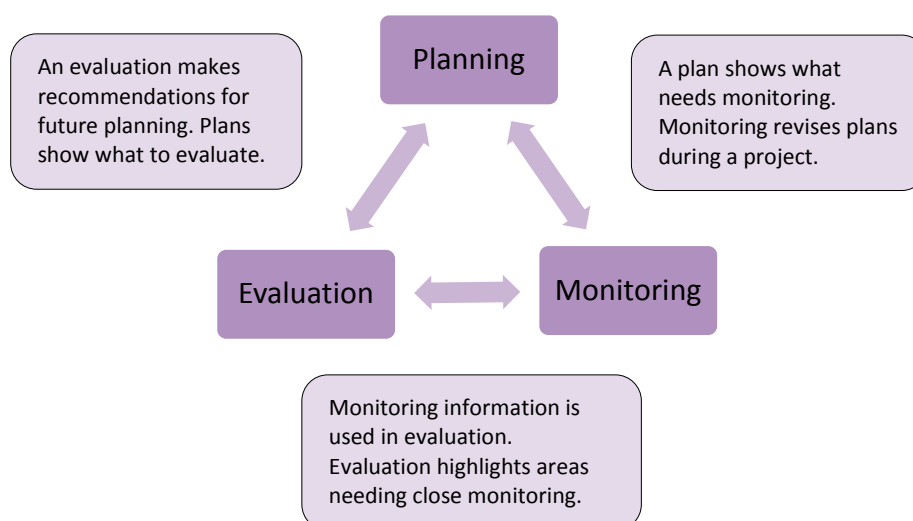
There are several reasons for this. Firstly, good planning allows for the easier identification of objectives and indicators – the desired changes a project or programme hopes to influence, and the evidence that will show whether those changes have happened. Secondly, in order to identify change it is often important to know what the situation was before a project or programme was implemented. This means data needs to be collected right from the start of a project or programme. Thirdly, the design of the M&E process itself may help to identify gaps or weaknesses in the planning process, 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 always relies on pre-planned objectives and indicators. On the contrary, most good M&E systems are designed to capture unintended changes, whether positive or negative, as well as intended ones. However, if M&E is not properly considered at the planning stage it may not even be possible to state which activities or changes were intended and which were not!

It is important to note that it is still possible to carry out effective M&E on a project or programme, 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 is not easy to compare the situation at the end of a project or programme with the situation at the start if desired changes have not previously been identified, and a baseline carried out. In the worst cases, all that may be possible is to list activities carried out, changes observed and lessons learned with no real idea of how they compare to what was considered realistic at the start.

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



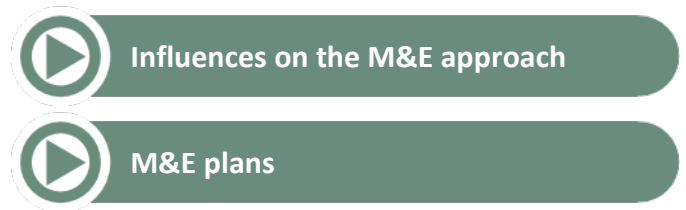
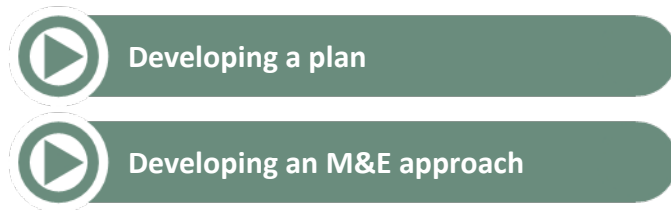
Working clockwise, a plan should show what needs to be monitored. The monitoring information gathered throughout a project or programme is then used at the evaluation stage. In turn, an evaluation may lead to the revision of plans – either in a new phase of the project or programme or in future projects or programmes. Working anti-clockwise, a plan will normally identify what needs to be evaluated, and an evaluation might pick up areas that need 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) should be integrated, in turn affecting (and being affected by) the other functions. This is why organisations are often encouraged to think of a PME System rather than just an M&E system.

Further reading and resources

The planning section is central to INTRAC's M&E Universe. The next four papers in this section cover the development of plans, influences that affect the design of an M&E approach, the development of an M&E approach and M&E plans.



References

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

Author(s): INTRAC

INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.

M&E Training & Consultancy

INTRAC's team of M&E specialists offer consultancy and training in all aspects of M&E, from core skills development through to the design of complex M&E systems.

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