



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for Food Security and Agriculture Programmes

Basic monitoring and evaluation concepts

Text-only version



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- define monitoring and evaluation (M&E); and
- identify differences between monitoring and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Before starting your M&E plan, you need to know a few basic concepts about programme monitoring and evaluation. Would you be able to answer the following questions?



What is monitoring and evaluation? What is it for?

What are the differences between monitoring and evaluation?

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Though you need to plan for both of them, **monitoring and evaluation** are **two distinct activities**.

➡ MONITORING

Monitoring is a continuous process of collecting data to verify whether the objectives of your programme are likely to be attained, and taking corrective actions when needed. Monitoring is usually done by identifying **expected results** at each step of the programme and the **indicators** to assess these results.

Situation

A component of Sharifa's programme aims to improve food security at country level by helping small farmers increase their productivity, and it does so via training activities. Let's learn more about monitoring and evaluation through Sharifa's programme steps.

Step # Impact level

Description: The changes that the programme is expected to provoke.

Example of monitoring indicator: National Productivity Rate.

Interpretation: Note that this indicator neither measures the impact of your programme (this is the role of the evaluation), nor its outcome. However, it is useful to provide a contextual view of what is happening in the country.

Step # Outcome level

Description: The consequences of the programme's outputs that are expected as a way to obtain the expected impact.

Example of monitoring indicator: Share of trained farmers that have adopted the new practices

Interpretation: It is key to the programme's success that this rate should be as close as possible to 100 percent. But from this step on, external factors might be strong enough to prevent your programme from reaching its objectives. If the rate was very low, you would need to commission a study or an evaluation to understand why it was low.

Step # Output level

Description: The direct results of the programme activities on its direct targets.

Example of monitoring indicator: Share of targeted farmers who completed the course.

Interpretation: If the rate is close enough to the target, and if the target has been set correctly, then it is likely that enough people have been trained to make a difference in terms of changing previous practices.

Step # Activity level

Description: The actions taken that are the actual content of the programme.

Example of monitoring indicator: Proportion of training sessions completed compared with the expected number of training sessions.

Interpretation: If this proportion is high, it is more likely that enough farmers have attended the training sessions.

Step # Input level

Description: The resources put into the programme.

Example of monitoring indicator: Budget delivery rate.

Interpretation: This will help you tell whether you are using the resources that have been allotted to the programme.

By definition, monitoring activities only rely on data that you can **easily and regularly retrieve** from activity reports, field visits of community workers, aggregation of external data, or, sometimes, via surveys. A monitoring system is an **effective way to know if the programme is running smoothly and if it is likely to be successful**.

It is also the best way to make an early identification of **any issue that may arise**. It allows you to investigate challenges with additional data collection, and sometimes with an evaluation, to understand what is happening so that you can take **corrective measures**.

The main audience for monitoring, programme managers and staff, are those who will be most interested in the results of the monitoring system, since they will have to make decisions based on this information. They may be in charge of many aspects of monitoring activities, or they may

delegate to an M&E officer. In any case, both should have a pivotal role in the preparation of the M&E plan.

➡ EVALUATION

Evaluation is the **systematic assessment** of a project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. It is usually done **once or twice in the lifetime of a programme**: first, to be sure that the programme is going in the right direction and to tweak activities if needed, and then, at the very end of the programme, to assess its impacts. (Source: *OECD DAC Glossary*). The main audience for evaluation is a larger audience, especially for accountability purposes.

In an evaluation, you would usually ask **questions** in order to assess the results of the programme. Evaluation questions help set the direction of the work and ensure that the answers will be useful to you and your team. Evaluation provides in-depth answers to a small set of questions that you and your partners are asking yourselves, and which need specific data collection, specific expertise or both. Evaluation routinely relies on advanced database analyses, surveys, and interviews with stakeholders, focus groups, case studies etc. Evaluation aims at understanding how and why, as much as whether or not your programme managed to achieve its objectives. It is an ideal way to step back from day-to-day management to learn lessons. Only evaluation, not monitoring, addresses the cause-and-effect questions. Evaluation is usually done by someone external to the team - either a supervisor or an external evaluator. This is an important condition to ensure the independence and credibility of the evaluation.

Examples of questions that Sharifa could develop for her programme:

Evaluation theme

Effectiveness

Definition: A programme is effective when its **expected results and objectives have been achieved**. When conducted during the midterm review, an **intermediate evaluation** assesses whether the expected outcomes have been achieved and how. A final evaluation considers whether **expected impacts** have been realized.

Example question: How far were the training activities a key driver to changes in the farmers' practices?
In which cases was the programme the best at improving the productivity of small farmers, and why?

Relevance	<p>Definition: A programme is relevant when its explicit objectives appropriately address the problem or issue they are meant to solve. This question is often asked during the intermediate evaluation to understand if the needs were appropriately assessed in the design phase, or at the end of the programme, when the problem is likely to have changed.</p> <p>Example question: To what extent was the productivity of small farmers the main issue to deal with to improve food security, especially compared to soil degradation?</p>
Internal coherence (consistency)	<p>Definition: Internal coherence is satisfactory when its different objectives logically contribute to one another. This assessment is especially useful when a programme is split into several priorities, as with the Country Programming Framework (CPF). It is an effective way to understand if the priorities contribute to each other and to a common goal.</p> <p>Example question: How far does the priority on strengthening sustainable management of natural resources support the increasing resilience of rural livelihoods to climate change?</p>
External coherence	<p>Definition: External coherence is satisfactory when its objectives correspond to those of other public interventions. This is a crucial question when several international organizations are developing similar or close interventions in the same country.</p> <p>Example question: In what way does the programme complement or contradict other development programmes such as those of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and how?</p>
Efficiency (i.e. cost-efficiency)	<p>Definition: A programme is efficient when its results were obtained at a reasonable cost. Of course, the difficulty lies in defining what a reasonable cost is. This calculation is often done by comparing similar interventions as a benchmark, or different activities with similar aims.</p> <p>This question cannot be answered if questions about effectiveness have not been answered first.</p> <p>Example question: Could similar results in terms of improved productivity have been obtained at lower cost with the distribution of higher yielding seeds?</p>

To summarize the difference between monitoring and evaluation by saying that...



Monitoring

Monitoring tracks your progress towards achieving your objectives tells you if the situation changes as expected. Monitoring is a programme management tool.

Evaluation

Evaluation tells you if your programme made the difference, and how. It aims at assessing the impact of your programme.

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And, finally, let's note that **evaluation strongly benefits from a good monitoring system**, in a variety of ways:

- **Good monitoring makes the evaluation more accurate:** If an issue has been spotted thanks to monitoring, the evaluation can investigate it.
- **Good monitoring makes the evaluation more focused:** When data about activities, outputs and first outcomes are already collected and analysed, the evaluation can build upon these data and focus on more interesting questions such as the impacts of the programme.
- **Good monitoring makes the evaluation more relevant:** If you already know about what has changed, the evaluation can focus on the how and why, and learning lessons from experience.

TIP: Designing and implementing an evaluation



Designing and implementing an evaluation is not the main topic of this course, but if you are to develop an M&E system, you will certainly be involved, to some extent, in the preparation and implementation of an evaluation. In this regard, we encourage you to access the material presented in the resources section, and to follow the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO's) e-learning course entitled "Integrating impact assessment into programme design".

SUMMARY

- **Monitoring** is a continuous process of collecting data to verify whether the objectives of your programme are likely to be attained, and taking corrective actions when needed. It can be considered as a **programme management tool**.

- **Evaluation** is a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results.
- Monitoring and evaluation **differ** in terms of **audience, timing, purposes** and **actors**.
- Good monitoring makes the evaluation more **focused, relevant** and **accurate**.