



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

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

Introduction

Text-only version



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will introduce you to the purpose and structure of this course.

At the end of this lesson, you will be aware of the importance of planning for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) so that you will deliver accurate and useful information about your programme's achievements.

You will also find out what this course offers and how it is organized.

INTRODUCTION

- ✓ If you do not measure results, you can not tell success from failure.
- ✓ If you can not see success, you can not reward it.
- ✓ If you can not reward success, you are probably rewarding failure.
- ✓ If you can not see success, you can not learn from it.
- ✓ If you can not recognize failure, you can not correct it.
- ✓ If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support.

Adapted from Osborne & Gaebler, 1992.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is understood to be a necessary and efficient process to deliver development results. But, too often, officers in the field are too busy with implementation issues to concentrate on M&E. However, M&E is not something you can add to your programme as an afterthought. It is actually a **part of your programme**, and is as crucial to its success as the activities you plan to roll out.

This course will guide you step-by-step in the development of a sound **M&E system**.

A M&E system is a system for planning for all the information needs for monitoring and evaluation during the life of a programme.

WHY PLANNING FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

Let's meet Sharifa, a newly appointed programme manager in a development organization. Sharifa's programme includes training to help farmers increase their productivity as well as several activities aimed at improving the country's legislation framework.



“Hello. My name is Sharifa. I have been appointed programme manager of a country programme aimed at improving the food security of small farmers. I have already done some monitoring and evaluation of a project, but it is my first experience at programme level.”

Why does Sharifa need an M&E system?

Planning for M&E is always good practice, even at project level. But **at programme level, it is a necessity.**

Programmes usually aim at many target groups, at many levels and in many places. You may know only a few of the beneficiaries, but not the majority. You need a well-planned M&E system so that you **know what is actually going on with the programme** and can make decisions accordingly. Programmes also usually comprise many activities, all of which are monitored and are delivering data and information. You need an M&E system in order to **avoid being overwhelmed with information** and so that the decisions you make are accurate.

Difference between projects and programmes

A **project** is a temporary endeavour, having a defined beginning and end (usually constrained by date, but possibly also by funding or deliverables). Projects are undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives, usually to bring about beneficial change or added value.

A **programme** is a set of projects or actions, grouped together to attain global objectives. It is less delimited in terms of schedule and budget, and is usually placed under the responsibility of some form of monitoring and/or advisory body. Programmes often comprise a range of different but complementary interventions with a common objective.

Typical projects	Programmes are complex objects in so far as they
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have one or only a few activities; • are implemented in a single context; • are intended for a limited number of groups; • have few direct results expected for that group; • have a single expected impact at a more global level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprise several activities (subsidies, direct investments, technical assistance, etc.); • are implemented in several contexts (different geographical areas, different sectors, etc.); • target several population and beneficiary groups; • are expected to produce multiple results across the different groups; • are expected to generate one common impact at a more global level.

Let's have a look at the M&E experience of three **colleagues working in the food and nutrition security** field.

Leila

"In our programme, the objectives had been poorly defined and every programme officer would pursue those she or he thought were the most relevant. Writing the M&E plan helped us make our objectives more explicit and allowed us to communicate more effectively with our partners. Recently, they asked us how they could contribute!"

Mulat

"We had been holding these training sessions for farmers aimed at adapting to climate change for more than two years, but the results were slow to show on the field. We surveyed participants and discovered that farmers were convinced that they needed to change their practice, but that the training did not offer the practical advice they needed. Now, we've improved the content of the training and have developed evaluation questionnaires after each training session so that we can immediately spot such issues in the future!"

Clara

"Our country programme aims to improve the country's legislation framework regarding food security, so we train and support government officials in that regard. The results in that area are hard to identify but we know that in the long run, such improvements can really make a difference. After the first year of implementation, it was clear that other partners for development did not have the same agenda. We used the opportunity of an M&E committee to invite them to discuss it. We shared evidence that we were heading in the right direction and were better able to include their own objectives in our action. Last year our efforts paid off when a new law passed, and we hope that it will really change people's lives!"

BENEFITS OF A RESULTS-BASED M&E SYSTEM

As previous testimonials show, the M&E system will help you to:

Define your objectives

An M&E system helps you make sure that your **objectives** are well understood and achievable.

Plan for data collection

An M&E system provides most of the **data** that you will use, and, even more importantly, gives you the plan for data **collection**.

Make sure your work will be used

An M&E system includes all the procedures and arrangements to make sure that the data collected is **used for decision-making**.

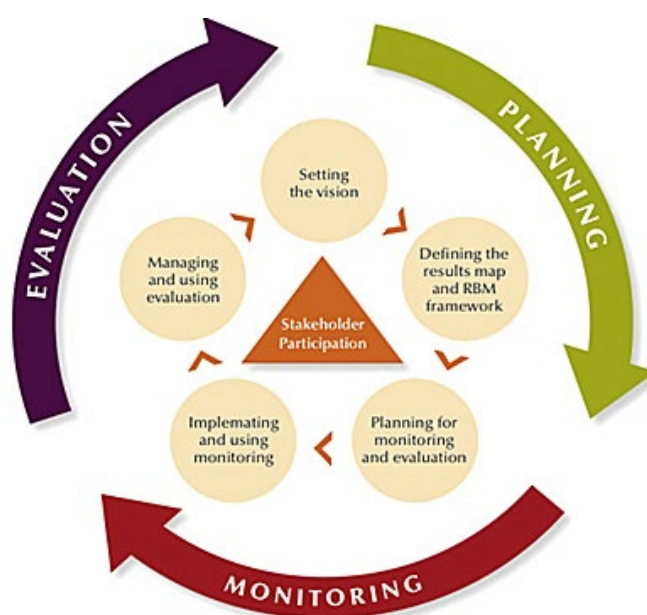
Learn to improve your programme

It is also the M&E system that provides the necessary information to **improve the programme**, year after year, but also to better design and implement the **next programme**.

The M&E system is a necessary condition to achieving Result-Based Management in your programme.

What is Result-Based Management (RBM)?

RBM is a management strategy by which **all actors**, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, ensure that their processes, products and services **contribute to the achievement of desired results** (that is, outputs, outcomes and higher-level goals or impact). The actors, in turn, use information and evidence on actual results to **inform decision-making** on the design, resourcing and delivery of programmes and activities for accountability and reporting.



The RBM life-cycle approach (Source: UNDG RBM Handbook).

Results-Based Management (RBM) is a **life-cycle approach** to M&E.

Each step must be done correctly to allow for the next step to proceed efficiently. For example, if you do not set your objectives well, it will be difficult to collect the right data for monitoring. Similarly, it will be unlikely that you will collect data in a timely way and launch evaluations when needed if you do not plan ahead. RBM also helps you **draw lessons from experience** and is, therefore, beneficial for the next programme you will design and implement.

As you can see, **monitoring and evaluation** is actually **a part of any project**, and is as **crucial to the programme's success** as the activities you plan to roll out.

In the framework of a project or a programme, engaging in RBM means that:

You will explicitly define the **goal** of the programme (what it is for?) and the **objectives** that you want to pursue.

You will make sure to **collect data** on the implementation and achievements of the programme, from year one and until the end.

You will make decisions **based on the information** collected and what it tells you about the results obtained.

Are you willing to engage in RBM?

Designing the M&E system is also a good opportunity to **involve stakeholders** in the implementation of the programme, and to make them commit to its success. When the results live **up to expectations**, it is also a good opportunity for you and your coworkers to **promote and celebrate your work**, which will enhance **team spirit**.

And if you don't achieve your results, you will be able to explore the reasons why with accurate and useful information from M&E.

The information provided by the monitoring and evaluation system will help your institution and your partners better understand the programme and the way it works, and you will be able to **share this knowledge with other stakeholders**. Your institution will be **accountable** for the outcomes and impacts it said it would achieve, and will be able to demonstrate to the other stakeholders that it **can do what it promised**. This may also help when considering further programme development at country level.

So, why should you take this course?

If you are involved in managing a programme, designing an M&E system, leading research or implementing M&E activities, and you wish to have concrete guidance on how to apply M&E methods to your programme, this course offers practical guidance on building an M&E system which is feasible, practical and relevant to your needs.

What is not covered in this course?

The course focuses on how to apply M&E methods to your programme, rather than describing M&E theories in detail. However, to learn more about specific topics related to M&E, you can refer to the resources listed in the course.

What does the course offer?

Through Sharifa's example, you will look at several components of an M&E plan that **you can build lesson by lesson** for your particular project or programme. The resources provided with this course will help you to complete this task.

Planning for M&E activities

Basic M&E concepts

Choosing what to monitor

Defining your indicators

M&E indicators: basic concepts

SUMMARY

A **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system** is a system for planning all the information needs for monitoring, pilotage and evaluation during the life of a programme.

In programmes, where you can not directly observe changes, an M&E system is needed to know what is actually going on, so that you can make decisions accordingly.

This course will offer you **step-by-step guidance** to prepare an **M&E plan** for your project or programme.

The course also provides a series of **job aids** and references for additional **resources** where you can find more in-depth information on various aspects of M&E.