**Module 6 Questions:**

**Q 1:** Explain the value of considering the implementation capacity and what steps to take therein while developing an M&E plan in an organization. (20 mrks)

the development of a M&E system is a participatory exercise. Staff at different levels of the organization who will be expected to maintain or use the new M&E system should always be consulted. This might include staff at head offices or secretariats, staff in regional or country offices, and staff at programme or project level.

**Step 1: Define the scope and purpose**

This step involves identifying the evaluation audience and the purpose of the M&E system.  M&E purposes include supporting management and decision-making, learning, accountability and stakeholder engagement.

Will the M&E be done mostly for learning purposes with less emphasis on accountability?  If this is the case, then the M&E system would be designed in such a way as to promote ongoing reflection for continuous programme improvement.

If the emphasis is more on accountability, then the M&E system could then collect and analyze data with more rigor and to coincide with the reporting calendar of a donor.

It is important that the M&E scope and purpose be defined beforehand, so that the appropriate M&E system is designed. It is of no use to have a M&E system that collects mostly ***qualitative data*** on an ***annual basis*** while your ‘evaluation audience’ (read: 'donor') is keen to see the ***quantitative results*** of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) ***twice a year***.

***'Be on the same page as the ‘evaluation audience''***

**Step 2: Define the evaluation questions**

Evaluation questions should be developed up-front and in collaboration with the primary audience(s) and other stakeholders who you intend to report to. Evaluation questions go beyond measurements to ask the higher order questions such as whether the intervention is worth it or if it could have been achieved in another way (see examples below).

**Step 3: Identify the monitoring questions**

For example, for an ***evaluation question*** pertaining to 'Learnings', such as "What worked and what did not?" you may have several ***monitoring questions*** such as "Did the workshops lead to increased knowledge on energy efficiency in the home?" or "Did the participants have any issues with the training materials?".

The monitoring questions will ideally be answered through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. It is important to not start collecting data without thinking about the evaluation and monitoring questions.  This may lead to collecting data just for the sake of collecting data (that provides no relevant information to the programme).

**Step 4: Identify the indicators and data sources**

In this step you identify what information is needed to answer your monitoring questions and where this information will come from (data sources). It is important to consider data collection in terms of the type of data and any types of research design. Data sources could be from primary sources, like from participant themselves or from secondary sources like existing literature. You can then decide on the most appropriate method to collect the data from each data source.

**Step 5: Identify who is responsible for data collection, data storage, reporting, budget and timelines**

It is advisable to assign responsibility for the data collection and reporting so that everyone is clear of their roles and responsibilities.

Collection of monitoring data may occur regularly over short intervals, or less regularly, such as half-yearly or annually. Likewise, the timing of evaluations (internal and external) should be noted.

You may also want to note any requirements that are needed to collect the data (staff, budget etc.). It is advisable to have some idea of the cost associated with monitoring, as you may have great ideas to collect a lot of information, only to find out that you cannot afford it all.

Additionally, it is good to determine how the collected data will be stored. A centralized electronic M&E database should be available for all project staff to use. The M&E database  options range from a simple Excel file to the use of a comprehensive M&E software such as [Log Alto](https://www.logalto.com/en/).

[Log Alto](https://www.logalto.com/en/) is a user-friendly cloud-based M&E software that stores all information related to the programme such as the entire log frame (showing the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes) as well as the quantitative and qualitative indicators with baseline, target and milestone values. [Log Alto](https://www.logalto.com/en/) also allows for the generation of tables, scorecards, charts and maps. Quarterly Progress reports can also be produced from [Log Alto](https://www.logalto.com/en/).

**Step 6: Identify who will evaluate the data and how it will be reported**

In most programmes there will be an internal and an independent evaluation (conducted by an external consultant).

For an evaluation to be used (and therefore useful) it is important to present the findings in a format that is appropriate to the audience. A 'Marketing and Dissemination Strategy’ for the reporting of evaluation results should be designed as part of the M&E system.

***‘Have a strategy to prevent persons from falling asleep during the presentation of evaluation findings’***

**Step 7: Decide on standard forms and procedures**

Once the M&E system is designed there will be a need for planning templates, designing or adapting information collection and analysis tools, developing organizational indicators, developing protocols or methodologies for service-user participation, designing report templates, developing protocols for when and how evaluations and impact assessments are carried out, developing learning mechanisms, designing databases  and the list goes on Semester, 2009.

However, there is no need to re-invent the wheel. There may already be examples of best practice within an organization that could be exported to different locations or replicated more widely. This leads to step 9.

**Step 8: Use the information derived from Steps 1- 7 above to fill in the 'M&E System ‘template**

You can choose from any of the templates presented in this [article](https://www.annmurraybrown.com/#!How-To-Design-a-Monitoring-and-Evaluation-ME-System/czf9/57092b650cf27cb8ad1e245e) to capture the information. Remember, they are templates, not cast in stone. Feel free to add extra columns or categories as you see fit.

**Step 9: Integrate the M&E system horizontally and vertically**

Where possible, integrate the M&E system horizontally (with other organizational systems and processes) and vertically (with the needs and requirements of other agencies).  Simister, 2009

Try as much as possible to align the M&E system with existing planning systems, reporting systems, financial or administrative monitoring systems, management information systems, human resources systems or any other systems that might influence (or be influenced by) the M&E system.

**Step 10: Pilot and then roll-out the system**

Once everything is in place, the M&E system may be first rolled out on a small scale, perhaps just at the Country Office level. This will give the opportunity for feedback and for the ‘kinks to be ironed out’ before a full-scale launch.

Staff at every level be should be aware of the overall purpose(s), general overview and the key focus areas of the M&E system.

It is also good to inform persons on which areas they are free to develop their own solutions and in which areas they are not. People will need detailed information and guidance in the areas of the system where everyone is expected to do the same thing or carry out M&E work consistently.

This could include guides, training manuals, mentoring approaches, staff exchanges, interactive media, training days or workshops.

**Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, my view is that a good M&E system should be robust enough to answer the evaluation questions, promote learning and satisfy accountability needs without being so rigid and inflexible that it stifles the emergence of unexpected (and surprising!) results.

**Q2:** Explain the main qualitative features of an M&E plan, which distinguishes it from any other plan in M&E. (10mrks)

As we monitor and evaluate projects, we use many kinds of qualitative methods, and each of these methods gives us different kinds of data.  Depending on our evaluation statement of work or performance monitoring plan, we use different methods on occasions to elicit certain kinds of data.

As we craft our qualitative or mixed method evaluation designs, we should consider what qualitative methods we would use, and what kind of data those methods would give us.  Evaluators have a large toolkit of qualitative methods, and we use each of these methods under different circumstances to gather different kinds of data.  As Nightengale and Rossman (2010) explain, we need to decide what our unit of analysis will be; the number of sites that we will use; how we will choose those sites; what data we need; and what method will give us that data.  We also need to consider Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry's (2012) constraints of time, budget, data, and politics as we plan our qualitative research and evaluations. We should pay special attention to ethical considerations, as qualitative researchers tend to spend a lot of time with informants, gathering sensitive data in the process.

Let’s consider the use of several qualitative methods through the project cycle, from planning, to implementation, and project conclusion.  We should consider what qualitative methods we would use, and what kind of data those methods would give us.

Planning  
As we are planning our project, if we are lucky, a donor will give us money to carry out a need’s assessment.  A quantitative needs assessment, perhaps even using already existing data, might tell us literacy rates or hospitalization rates, for example.  This kind of data can be important for our project, depending on its scope, objectives, and activities.

A qualitative needs assessment might give us more of a disaggregated perspective of literacy or health issues that considers emic perspectives.  Observation might give us a picture of what is happening in the project setting.  Participant observation might give us more of an emic understanding of what is happening, especially if we are allowed into the backstage where the observer effect is no longer as evident.  At this stage, key informant interviews might give us some possible project parameters, and this might be of importance if there are gatekeepers in the community who could help or hinder a project and its activities.  Participatory tools like seasonal calendars might help us to understand the emic needs of the community, and the different local events or micropolitics issues that might impact project implementation and beneficiary access.

Understanding the needs of the community is an important process, and with emic data we can construct projects and activities and set indicators that are culturally appropriate.

Another aspect here is baseline data collection.  We sometimes collect this as we are planning our project, and we sometimes collect it just before we start our activities.  Collecting baseline data may be important if we want to be able to show outcomes or conduct an impact assessment after the conclusion of our project.  If we want to show the impact of our project, or the changes in people’s attitudes, behaviors, or competencies, then we may need a baseline to compare to.  Depending on our project, we might use a census table or a structured interview schedule to collect baseline data during the planning phase of a project.

Implementation  
We incorporate qualitative data into our monitoring efforts and formative evaluations so that we can improve project activities. We adapt and learn from our project’s implementation when we carry out formative evaluations.

Qualitative methods that monitor progress are particularly important during the implementation phase of a project.  Using qualitative data to monitor projects gives us insight into a project’s activities as they are being implemented.  This can be more helpful to us than quantitative data, such as “number of people trained.”  Indeed, one of the most common uses of qualitative data is to help explain or add perspective to quantitative data.  We can use qualitative data to tweak or change direction of our programming, especially if we are not hitting our intended objectives or making progress towards our indicators.

We use observation to see what is happening in our project, who is participating, and who is not participating.  We use participant observation and key informant interviews to understand what is happening in our project as it is being implemented.   [Focus groups](https://programs.online.american.edu/msme/resource/focus-groups-qualitative-research?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)and participatory tools are also important for us so that we can get a wider perspective of project activities and outputs.

Outcomes and Impact  
Showing causation between the baseline and outcome data is something to consider in the design of an impact evaluation. Without that baseline data, we might not be able to show our project’s impact, so we need to think about collecting baseline data during the planning or at the start of the implementation phase if we want to show this later on.

As above, [observation](https://programs.online.american.edu/msme/resource/observation?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)and participant observation allow us to observe and understand change that has or has not taken place in society as a result of our program.  Key informant interviews and focus groups give us insight into the change, or lack thereof.

Concluding Thoughts  
While our evaluation designs need to be solid, we also need to have knowledge to implement the designs within other historical, cultural, and linguistic settings.  Our designs are only going to take us so far, and that we as evaluators need training and expertise to use [qualitative methods](https://programs.online.american.edu/msme/resource/introduction-to-qualitative-research-methods?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)in culturally appropriate ways.

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**Request Info**

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