**AFRICACENTER FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

**POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

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**MODULE 6 ASSIGNMENT:**

**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)

**Capacity building** is intended to improve performance of the M&E system. Monitoring capacity building interventions enables managers to systematically track progress in M&E system implementation and performance and to identify areas where improvements are needed. For effective monitoring of capacity building, the following recommendations are highly relevant:

• Use the products or outputs of interventions defined in the national M&E capacity building plan to monitor implementation.

• Define one or two important performance results (i.e., benchmarks or indicators) for each system component and use these to expand, refine or revise the existing capacity building strategies.

Planning for M&E capacity building monitoring should involve all relevant stakeholders at national, sub-national and service-delivery levels. The act of planning is in itself a way to build capacity by encouraging participants to think in evaluative terms.

Key steps in monitoring M&E capacity building

**The following four steps will help facilitate the monitoring of M&E capacity building:**

**Step 1: Define the scope and scale of M&E system capacity and performance.**

Monitoring the progress of capacity building could look at the system as a whole or it might be limited to specific components of the system that have received capacity building support in a defined period. Decisions about the scope and scale of monitoring should be informed by what decisions need to be taken as well as what resources are available. For example, an assessment of the overall M&E system may be conducted when it is time to revise the national multi-year, multi-sectorial M&E plan. Conversely, an annual review of the performance of the M&E system based on selected key results may be useful to make adjustments in the annual M&E work plan, report progress to stakeholders and encourage further development of M&E capacity. One important benefit of the routine use of the same M&E system assessment tool and consistent use of standardized results is the ability to make comparisons over time and improve the understanding of the M&E system’s development.

**Step 2: Define indicators or benchmarks.**

To help choose the most appropriate measures for monitoring M&E capacity and system performance over time, indicators or benchmarks should:

• Reflect the performance results for each system component.• Be able to detect changes in performance.

• Be standardized to allow comparisons over time.

• Draw from readily available data sources, which are already reported on a routine basis ideally, one or two indicators or benchmarks should already be defined for the capacity building priorities that are part of the development and regular updating of the national multi-year, multi-sectorial M&E plan and the annual M&E work plan. It may be important to also look for synergies between capacity building interventions and coordination of capacity building efforts.

**Step 3: Identify data sources and data collection tools.**

Once capacity building indicators or benchmarks have been defined, the next step is to identify the data sources needed to track these measures. M&E of capacity building often uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative methods usually involve surveys or other types of questionnaires that gather respondent information that can be aggregated. These data often provide the basis for comparing programme processes or effects across various types of respondents and/or various time periods before and after capacity interventions are delivered. Qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, direct observation) can provide an understanding about contextual factors and interactions, as well as people’s values, perceptions, and motivations.

As noted above, in most cases indicators or benchmarks should draw from existing data sources or rely on data collection tools that are already routinely used.

These data sources and tools may include:

• Results from national and sub-national M&E system assessments.

• Routine health, education, and other information systems.

• Financial and administrative data on human resources.

• Reports to stakeholders and donors.

• Policies and/or legal/regulatory statements (e.g., bills, acts, white papers).

• Organizational capacity assessments.

• Supervision reports and self-evaluation reports.

• International and national training databases.

**Step 4: Develop a written plan for monitoring M&E capacity building.**

The final step in preparing for M&E capacity building monitoring is to write a simple work plan to guide the implementation.

This work plan should include information on the following topics:

• Approach (e.g., methods, indicators/benchmarks, instruments and data sources).

• Time frame for data collection, analysis and reporting.

• How data will be stored.

• Assigned roles and responsibilities for different sectors and organizations.

• Budget.

• How results and reports will be disseminated to stakeholders.

• How results will be used. (A data use calendar may help in determining when data are needed for key decisions and for reporting to stakeholders and donors,

**A monitoring and evaluation plan** (M&E) plan is a guide that explains the goals and objectives of an M&E strategy and its key elements. Let’s try and explain this concept in simple words – an M&E plan is like a roadmap that helps to define, implement, track and improve a monitoring and evaluation strategy within a particular project or a group of projects; it states everything that needs to happen from the project planning phase until the project reaches its goal and creates the intended impact.

**Steps to take therein while developing an M&E plan in an organization**

**Step 1: Identifying the focal problem and the need for a project**

Before we begin to conceptualize a project, it is essential to understand the underlying problem is the community of interest and explores what’s causing it, what interventions could solve this problem and how long would the intervention need to last for it to be effective. The project will thus be designed based on the need for a certain assumed intervention.

There are many strategic ways to identify the focal problem and its causes, but one common way organizations define these are through a ‘Problem Tree Analysis.’ This is a group activity that involves input from project team members, stakeholders and beneficiaries who can contribute relevant technical and local knowledge.

The first step is to define the main problem that all the team members mutually agree upon and visualize it on a flip-chart or a white board as the trunk of a tree. Next, through many rounds of discussions and dialogues, the team identifies the causes of the problem and visualizes them as the roots of the tree. Finally, the team brainstorms on the potential consequences of the problem and exhibits them as the branches of the tree. Team members can also add additional branches for solutions, concerns and decisions.

This is an effective practice as it maps out a realistic picture of a problem from economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions, while building a shared sense of purpose, action and understanding amongst the involved parties.

**Step 2: Planning the project**

Once we have fully grasped the underlying problem and mapped out its causes and consequences, we can begin to plan our project.

**Identifying project goals, objectives and inputs/activities**

Before we begin the groundwork of M&E plan, it is essential to understand where we need to go and how we are going to get there. This is possible by identifying clear and concise goals, objectives and relevant activities.

* ***Goals:*** The final impacts on the lives of the beneficiaries or the environment that the project intends to achieve
* ***Objectives:*** longer-term change in the environment or the behaviour of project beneficiaries that is needed to achieve the overall goal
* ***Activities/Input:*** direct interventions and processes of the project

**Identifying key players**

This step involves identifying key internal and external stakeholders who will be involved in the project or who will benefit from the project. The key stakeholders include the project team, donors, and stakeholders in the wider community (community groups, networks, residents etc.), partner organizations, local and national policy makers, other government bodies/ministries and the project beneficiaries.

**Identifying monitoring and evaluation questions**

In this step, program managers or M&E specialists with input from all stakeholders and donors identify the most important M&E questions the project will investigate. M&E questions, when answered will allow the managers to determine their internal capacity and processes in terms of vision, leadership, budget, management, sustainability etc. The M&E questions also allow the managers to gauge the relevance, effectiveness, impact and contributions of the interventions at different stages of the project life-cycle.

By identifying these questions early on in the process, project managers or M&E specialists are prepared to design tools, instruments, and methodologies required to gather the needed information. M&E questions may require revisions every now and then depending on the status of the project.

**Roles and responsibilities**

This is another important step to include while planning a project because defining the roles of project staff members and stakeholders early on will clarify who would be in charge of what activities, including communications, project management, project design and implementation, data collection, data analysis, reporting etc. and avoid unnecessary confusions later on during project implementation.

**Cost estimates for the monitoring and evaluation activities**

It is essential to allocate tentative budget and provide an explanation of the needed resources in the planning phase. This includes – money and personnel, capacity development, infrastructure, etc. M&E experts suggest allocating approximately 5 to 10 percent of total project costs for M&E programming.

**Understanding the overall context**

It is important to understand the political and administrative structures of the community where your project will take place, along with the roles and influences of existing policies that may affect project implementation. Likewise, it is also recommended to start thinking about the potential risks and unexpected circumstances that might arise during project implementation, for example, any reluctance on the key players’ part for cooperation etc.

Once a clear picture of the overall goals and objectives of the project are defined, the key players are identified and the context is well understood, it is time to select an appropriate approach and sketch out the detailed design of the implementation plan.

**Step 3: Defining a monitoring and evaluation framework**

By the time we reach this step, we should have sufficient background knowledge to design a framework. A framework increases understanding of the project’s goals and objectives and defines the relationships between factors key to implementation. A framework also articulates the external and internal elements that could affect the project’s success.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no one size fits all when it comes to frameworks. Different kinds of projects use different kinds of frameworks, the best way to determine your ideal type is by understanding the scope of your project and then choosing the one that best fits the purpose. These three types of M&E frameworks are widely used in the development and humanitarian sectors:

* ***Theory of Change* *–*** A theory of change shows a bigger picture (which could sometimes get complex) of all the underlying processes and possible pathways leading to long term behavioral changes in the institutional, individual or community levels, while visualizing all the possible evidence and assumptions that are linked to those changes.
* ***Logical Framework (LogFrame)/Logic Model******–*** Unlike the theory of change, a LogFrame is to the point and focuses only on one specific pathway that a project deals with and creates a neat and orderly structure for it. This makes it easier for the project managers and stakeholders to monitor project implementation.
* ***Results Framework –***A results framework emphasizes on results to provide clarity around the key project objectives. In other words, it outlines how each of the intermediate results/ outputs and outcomes relates to and facilitates the achievement of each objective, and how objectives relate to each other and the ultimate goal. These three frameworks may have some differences in practice, but there are also some common elements that run through them, like the need for the identification and involvement of key stakeholders; the need for well-defined goals, objectives, activities and outputs, the same general purpose of describing how the project will lead to results and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

**Step 4: Identifying relevant indicators**

Once the program’s goals and objectives are defined and an outline of an M&E framework is in place, it is time to define indicators for tracking progress towards achieving those goals. A good mix of *process*, *outcome and impact* indicators is always recommended.

*Process indicators* track the progress of the project. These indicators help us get clarity on whether activities are being implemented as planned. On the other hand, *outcome indicators* track how successful program activities have been at achieving project objectives. Unlike process indicators, these indicators focus more on what the project is trying to achieve rather than how it is being achieved. *Impact indicators* measure the long term goals or impacts of a project.

**Step 5: Identifying data collection tools and methodologies**

After creating monitoring indicators, it is time to identify and collect relevant data to demonstrate the actual results of the project interventions against our indicators. M&E experts recommend involving the project team and stakeholders in the discussion to make the process more participatory. Before collecting data, it is a good idea to discuss these questions as a team:

* Will the data be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two?
* What baseline data already exists?
* What are the most relevant methods and tools to collect new data?
* How will the collected data be recorded?
* How and when will the data be analysed?
* Who will be responsible for data collection and analysis?

The golden rule to follow here is to collect fewer useful data properly than a lot of data poorly. It is important for project managers to take into consideration staff time and resource costs of data collection to see what is reasonable.

What is a good way to determine the most relevant source of monitoring data? This depends largely on what each indicator is trying to measure. The program will likely need multiple data sources to answer all the monitoring and evaluation questions. Data sources could be participants themselves, literature, national statistics, the whole community, individual homes or anyone or anything that can help to generate the relevant data. Once the appropriate sources have been selected, the next step would be to decide on the appropriate tools and methods to collect the data from the data source. Some common types of data collection methods are as follows:

* Surveys
* Questionnaires
* Focus groups
* Case studies
* Interviews
* Workshops
* Content analysis of materials etc.

Apart from the traditional pen and paper methods, there are many digital data collection tools available in the market to help data collectors gather data faster and more efficiently. These online or offline tools also help to avoid human errors that can arise during data collection and input. Some widely used data collection tools are [KoBo Toolbox](https://www.kobotoolbox.org/), [CommCare](https://www.dimagi.com/commcare/), [SurveyCTO](https://www.surveycto.com/), [ONA](https://ona.io/home/) etc.

Once the process of data collection is determined, it is also necessary to decide how frequently data will be collected. This will depend on the needs of the project, donor requirements, available resources, and the timeline of the intervention. Most data will be continuously gathered by the program, while others at certain intervals. Gathered data is usually recorded every few months, depending on the agreed upon timeline.

**Step 6: Reviewing M&E Work Plan (M&E practitioners recommend conducting this on a periodic basis)**

Now that we’ve mapped out our indicators and data collection plan, it is time to revisit our M&E plan to see our progress toward the project goals and objectives and revise it based on the current needs of the project – what is the status of the project? How well are the activities being implemented? Are they generating intended outcomes or to what extent are our interventions in line with the needs of the community? What needs to be improved, added or changed at this point? etc.

At this stage, it is also good to revisit the fund allocation for the evaluation and see if our plan fits well within the available budget and resources. Roles and responsibilities for each component of the work plan should also be clearly explained. Would we need to outsource a particular segment of the evaluation to an external party?

Reviewing our M&E work plan also allows new team members, if any, to familiarize with the project and get a sense of what his/her responsibilities are and how the other roles and responsibilities are divided amongst the group.

**Step 7: Reporting**

Once data is gathered and analyzed, it must be reported to the relevant members as regularly as possible to discuss and interpret findings. The intention of reporting should always be to provide clarity on the most up-to-date results to staff members and stakeholders about the progress, success and failure of the project and to help them make data-driven decisions for modifications of project components and to develop future work plans as necessary. Also, data must be reported so that it can increase knowledge and make contributions to the related field for the future projects and practices to be more effective. If the project results and data are not dissemination adequately then it might lead to duplicate monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Thus, the M&E work plan should include an effective strategy for internal dissemination of data among the project team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders, donors and external audiences. The plan should also articulate what format will be used to share the findings – formal meetings with donors and stakeholders, written reports, oral presentations, program materials or community and stakeholder feedback sessions.

Besides the traditional reporting techniques, many organisations are also opting for digital M&E tools and software like [TolaData.](https://www.toladata.com/) These tools usually come with dashboard and portfolio features that allow users to visualise data into graphs, charts, reports and images for real-time reporting. These tools make reporting so much easier and help organisations to provide more clarity on their progress and ensure transparency and accountability at all levels.

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

A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan is a document that helps to track and assess the results of the interventions throughout the life of a program. It is a living document that should be referred to and updated on a regular basis. While the specifics of each program’s M&E plan will look different, they should all follow the same basic structure and include the same key elements.

An M&E plan will include some documents that may have been created during the program planning process, and some that will need to be created new. For example, elements such as the [logic model](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-logic-model-0)/logical framework, theory of change, and [monitoring indicators](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-monitoring-indicators) may have already been developed with input from [key stakeholders](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-conduct-stakeholder-workshop%20) and/or the program donor. The M&E plan takes those documents and develops a further plan for their implementation.

It is important to develop an M&E plan before beginning any monitoring activities so that there is a clear plan for what questions about the program need to be answered. It will help program staff decide how they are going to collect data to track [indicators](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-monitoring-indicators), how monitoring data will be analyzed, and how the results of data collection will be disseminated both to the donor and internally among staff members for program improvement. Remember, M&E data alone is not useful until someone puts it to use! An M&E plan will help make sure data is being used efficiently to make programs as effective as possible and to be able to report on results at the end of the program.

Generally, M&E plan has the following qualitative features which distinguishes it from other plan :

* the underlying assumptions on which the achievement of programme goals depend;
* the anticipated relationships between activities, outputs, and outcomes (the framework);
* well-defined conceptual measures and definitions, along with baseline data;
* the monitoring schedule;
* a list of data sources to be used;
* cost estimates for the monitoring and evaluation activities;
* a list of the partnerships and collaborations that will help achieve the desired results; and
* a plan for the dissemination and utilization of the information gained.

**REFERENCES**

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