Fundamentals of Monitoring and Evaluation

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1. **The main value of Monitoring and Evaluation**

It is aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a project or organization.

It helps to keep the work on track, and can let management know when things are going wrong.

It is an invaluable tool for good management, and it provides a useful base for evaluation.

It enables you to determine whether the resources you have available are sufficient and are being well used, whether the capacity you have is sufficient and appropriate, and whether you are doing what you planned to do.

It is also geared towards learning from what you are doing and how you are doing it, by focusing on: efficiency, effectiveness, impact.

1. **Key planning steps for setting up an M&E plan**

**Step 1: Identify Program Goals and Objectives**

The first step to creating an M&E plan is to identify the program goals and objectives. If the program already has a logic model or theory of change, then the program goals are most likely already defined. However, if not, the M&E plan is a great place to start. Identify the program goals and objectives.

Defining program goals starts with answering three questions:

What problem is the program trying to solve?

What steps are being taken to solve that problem?

How will program staff know when the program has been successful in solving the problem?

**Step 2: Define Indicators**

Once the program’s goals and objectives are defined, it is time to define indicators for tracking progress towards achieving those goals. Program indicators should be a mix of those that measure process, or what is being done in the program, and those that measure outcomes.

Process indicators track the progress of the program. They help to answer the question, “Are activities being implemented as planned?” Some examples of process indicators are:

Number of trainings held with health providers

Number of outreach activities conducted at youth-friendly locations

Number of condoms distributed at youth-friendly locations

Percent of youth reached with condom use messages through the media

Outcome indicators track how successful program activities have been at achieving program objectives. They help to answer the question, “Have program activities made a difference?” Some examples of outcome indicators are:

Percent of youth using condoms during first intercourse

Number and percent of trained health providers offering family planning services to youth

Number and percent of new STI infections among youth.

These are just a few examples of indicators that can be created to track a program’s success. More information about creating indicators can be found in the How to Develop Indicators guide.

**Step 3: Define Data Collection Methods and Timeline**

After creating monitoring indicators, it is time to decide on methods for gathering data and how often various data will be recorded to track indicators. This should be a conversation between program staff, stakeholders, and donors. These methods will have important implications for what data collection methods will be used and how the results will be reported.

The source of monitoring data depends largely on what each indicator is trying to measure. The program will likely need multiple data sources to answer all of the programming questions. Below is a table that represents some examples of what data can be collected and how.

**Step 4: Identify M&E Roles and Responsibilities**

The next element of the M&E plan is a section on roles and responsibilities. It is important to decide from the early planning stages who is responsible for collecting the data for each indicator. This will probably be a mix of M&E staff, research staff, and program staff. Everyone will need to work together to get data collected accurately and in a timely fashion.

Data management roles should be decided with input from all team members so everyone is on the same page and knows which indicators they are assigned. This way when it is time for reporting there are no surprises.

**Step 5: Create an Analysis Plan and Reporting Templates**

Once all of the data have been collected, someone will need to compile and analyze it to fill in a results table for internal review and external reporting. This is likely to be an in-house M&E manager or research assistant for the program.

The M&E plan should include a section with details about what data will be analyzed and how the results will be presented. Do research staff need to perform any statistical tests to get the needed answers? If so, what tests are they and what data will be used in them? What software program will be used to analyze data and make reporting tables? Excel? SPSS? These are important considerations.

**Step 6: Plan for Dissemination and Donor Reporting**

The last element of the M&E plan describes how and to whom data will be disseminated. Data for data’s sake should not be the ultimate goal of M&E efforts.  Data should always be collected for particular purposes.

Consider the following:

How will M&E data be used to inform staff and stakeholders about the success and progress of the program?

How will it be used to help staff make modifications and course corrections, as necessary?

How will the data be used to move the field forward and make program practices more effective?

The M&E plan should include plans for internal dissemination among the program team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders and donors. For example, a program team may want to review data on a monthly basis to make programmatic decisions and develop future work plans, while meetings with the donor to review data and program progress might occur quarterly or annually. Dissemination of printed or digital materials might occur at more frequent intervals. These options should be discussed with stakeholders and your team to determine reasonable expectations for data review and to develop plans for dissemination early in the program. If these plans are in place from the beginning and become routine for the project, meetings and other kinds of periodic review have a much better chance of being productive ones that everyone looks forward to.

1. **Relevance of stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation**

Participation by project stakeholders means sharing a common understanding and involvement in the decision-making process of the project. Participation by stakeholders leads to empowerment and to joint ownership of the project. To increase participation the project should start with a consultation process that moves to negotiations and ends with joint decisions. Participation by project stakeholders has many benefits and advantages, among them are:

* Ensures that the project plans are a reflection of the real needs and priorities.
* Develops an environment of trusts by allowing the voices of the stakeholders be heard and their issues be known.
* Makes the project accountable to the stakeholders.
* Enables the voices of the stakeholders to be heard and by doing that the level of trust in the relationships increases.
* Promotes transparency in the actions of the project and ensures that the project is held accountable for its actions.
* Increases ownership by stakeholders who feel the project is taking in account their views and motivates them to sponsor the project, which ultimately leads to sustainability.
* Is a key strategy to win support to the project, to gain commitment to the project, and ultimately to increase the chances for sustainability after the project has been completed.

Real development requires a people centered approach instead of an output oriented one. Project managers need to break the conventional approach of top-down solutions to incorporate a bottom-up approach that enables a more sustainable solution.

While participation may require more time and resources and may be more difficult to implement; the results is an increase in commitment to the project. Stakeholders who are consulted and made part of the solution feel more willing to support the project.

1. **Why it is imperative that sufficient resources are allocated to the conduct of Monitoring and Evaluation in a program**

Management of project organization need to pay attention to the provision of resources for M&E activities since these resources influences the usability of the data the systems collect. They should prioritize these allocations using empirical data on the need of each organization.

Development of professionalism in M&E is important in all sectors and allocating resources for this would be beneficial to all stakeholders who demand for M&E results. This calls for a broader policy thought out across the sectors.

At the programme level, the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to track implementation and outputs systematically, and measure the effectiveness of programmes. It helps determine exactly when a programme is on track and when changes may be needed. Monitoring and evaluation forms the basis for modification of interventions and assessing the quality of activities being conducted.

Monitoring and evaluation can be used to demonstrate that programme efforts have had a measurable impact on expected outcomes and have been implemented effectively. It is essential in helping managers, planners, implementers, policy makers and donors acquire the information and understanding they need to make informed decisions about programme operations.

Monitoring and evaluation helps with identifying the most valuable and efficient use of resources. It is critical for developing objective conclusions regarding the extent to which programmes can be judged a “success”. Monitoring and evaluation together provide the necessary data to guide strategic planning, to design and implement programmes and projects, and to allocate, and re-allocate resources in better ways.

The budgetary allocation for M&E activities, hiring of qualified M&E personnel by organizations, allocating funds for engaging M&E experts, buying M&E reference materials, allocating resources for training in M&E and use of organizational assets to carry out M&E activities are very mandatory in order to guarantee optimum success in a program. Additionally, allocating these resources for M&E activities has a significant influence on M&E result utilization. If organizations take keen interest in prioritizing these allocations along other project expenditures, there would be an increase in M&E result utilization.In overall M&E value comes from using the information to monitor, guide and control implementation for enhanced performance and better results.

1. **The considerations and questions that both monitoring and evaluation seeks to answer**

* Has there been any change in the operating environment/context? If so what and why?
* Are the needs still the same, or have needs evolved that the programme is not addressing?
* To what extent are the right people being targeted by the project? How does it compare to overall needs and input of other agencies? Is any readjustment required?
* Is the project activity plan on track? If not, why not and what can be done to correct this?
* If the current rate of progress continues, will project activities achieve the intended objectives (outputs and outcomes)? If not, why not and what can be done to correct this?
* Is the project having any unanticipated effects? Are these positive or negative?
* Has the project achieved the intended indicator level?
* Looking at what the project or organization intended to achieve – was the change or impact intended achieved? If not, why not?
* Looking at the project plan, organizational strategy, or specific thematic policies - was there a clear plan/strategy/policy in place? Was this utilized to shape activities? Did the plan/strategy/ policy work? If not, why not?
* Looking at processes - was there an efficient use of resources? What was the opportunity cost of resource allocation? How sustainable is the way the project or organization works? What are the implications for the various stakeholders in the way the organization works?

1. **The relationship between change assumptions” and impact in a project**

Change assumption articulate about the process through which change will occur, and specifies the ways in which all of the required early and intermediate outcomes related to achieving a desired long-term change will be brought about and documented as they occur .Here, it comprises the description or visualisation of the change process and accompanying assumptions from problem definition to the identification of knowledge gaps through research design and execution to the realisation of expected output and outcomes and the desired contribution to impact. It is an important tool for monitoring and evaluation, and in particular for learning.

**References**

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