PROJECT AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Within CSOs, most monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activity is carried out for basic project or programme management purposes. This includes tracking resources, ensuring they are used properly, addressing problems as they occur, taking advantage of opportunities, and ensuring that projects and programmes are managed in an effective way so that they can achieve the best possible results.

Within social development there is an ongoing debate about whether monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be carried out primarily for accountability or learning. However, within CSOs the vast majority of all M&E activity is carried out for basic project or programme management purposes. This includes tracking resources, ensuring they are used properly, addressing problems as they occur, taking advantage of opportunities, and ensuring that projects and programmes are managed in an effective way so that they can achieve the best possible results.

It is not always easy to see the difference between learning and project or programme management, as there are no commonly agreed definitions for these terms. There is often a large degree of overlap (see box below).

Learning and Project Management

Project management involves the regular collection and analysis of information, and its use to make immediate decisions. For example, if a CSO knows that it is due to deliver supplies to farmers on Wednesday, but has yet to receive the supplies on Monday, it knows it either must chase up those supplies or cancel the distribution. In this case there is immediate action, yet little learning involved.

However, if a CSO finds out that women are more likely to attend community meetings when they are held in the afternoon rather than the evening, it is able to improve the participation of woman in a project by re-scheduling the meetings. It might then be worthwhile recording this information for the future benefit of the project, but also for other projects run by the CSO, or similar projects run by other organisations. This is an example of where project management and learning overlaps.

Equally, although learning within a project may be used to make decisions within that project, sometimes it has no immediate applicability. For example, a project might learn that unnecessary delays were caused by a failure to engage certain stakeholders early in the process. Even if it is too late to change this, and therefore the information is no use for immediate project management, it might still be worth recording the learning so that it can be applied in future projects.

Another area of overlap is between monitoring and management. In relatively simple projects and programmes there is often a large degree of overlap between the two. Both require the regular collection and analysis of information on a day-to-day basis in order to effectively track resources and deliver activities and outputs. Many monitoring activities – such as visiting projects in the field, talking to beneficiaries, implementing complaints mechanisms, etc. – are indistinguishable from good management practices.

M&E focused on medium- to longer-term changes brought about through a project or programme may also feed into management decision-making. However, this is more likely to be periodic – for example after a review or evaluation – rather than ongoing.

At the other end of the scale there is a separate debate around the contribution of M&E to the management of large, complex programmes of work, known as adaptive programming or adaptive management. This is dealt with in a separate paper in the M&E Universe. The remainder of this paper is concerned with monitoring designed to support the ongoing, day-to-day management of projects and programmes.

Basic monitoring processes

The type of monitoring needed by CSOs is heavily dependent on the type of project. Projects vary enormously: they can be standalone or part of a wider programme of work; they may involve a small grant or one of many thousands of pounds; they may be funded by a single donor or many donors (or none); they may be carried out by a CSO directly or through a partner; they may involve many different ways of working (e.g. service delivery, advocacy, capacity development); and they may be implemented in many different sectors, such as health, governance or livelihoods.

All these differences influence the type of monitoring required for management purposes. It is therefore hard to generalise. Some of the most common monitoring practices include:

- filling in forms and templates designed to collect and record regularly occurring quantitative data, such as the number of people attending meetings, the amount of savings collected through self-help groups, the number of seeds disbursed etc.;

- conducting regular staff, project or community meetings and recording the minutes;
- carrying out and recording field visits to project sites;
- recording the results of data collection processes such as interviews, focus group discussions and observation;
- keeping staff diaries or notebooks to record comments, opinions and events;
- collecting photographs, videos, press cuttings or other media products; and

Most CSOs also produce regular monitoring reports, which summarise the information collected and present it to managers in a form that allows them to make decisions. Basic monitoring reports often cover:

- a summary of results (outputs and/or outcomes);
- activities carried out and resources used;
- progress made over a period;
- challenges or areas of concern;
- external changes affecting a project or programme (or which might affect them);
- recommendations for change;
- areas requiring further investigation;
- lessons learned that may be useful for the project or programme or other projects; and
- other observations of interest.

Tracking tools and templates

Much M&E for project or programme management is concerned with tracking activities, checklists, indicators, questions and actions. This is often done by creating simple templates that list the items to be tracked in a left-hand column and then provide space for staff to record observations or measurements within each row. Some common tracking templates are described below.

Activities: In order to plan the implementation of a project or programme in detail, a project or programme strategy is often broken down into an operational activity plan or set of plans. This enables everyone to know what needs to be done, when and by whom. Activity plans are normally developed by the CSO implementing a project. So, for example, within a large programme there may be many different activity plans designed by different operational CSOs implementing projects.

The most common type of activity plan used by CSOs is called a Gantt Chart. This is a chart that shows a sequence of different activities. It consists of a time line, a basic list of activities, and a bar or set of bars for each activity that shows when it is carried out and how long it lasts. An example of a simple Gantt chart is shown at the bottom of this page.

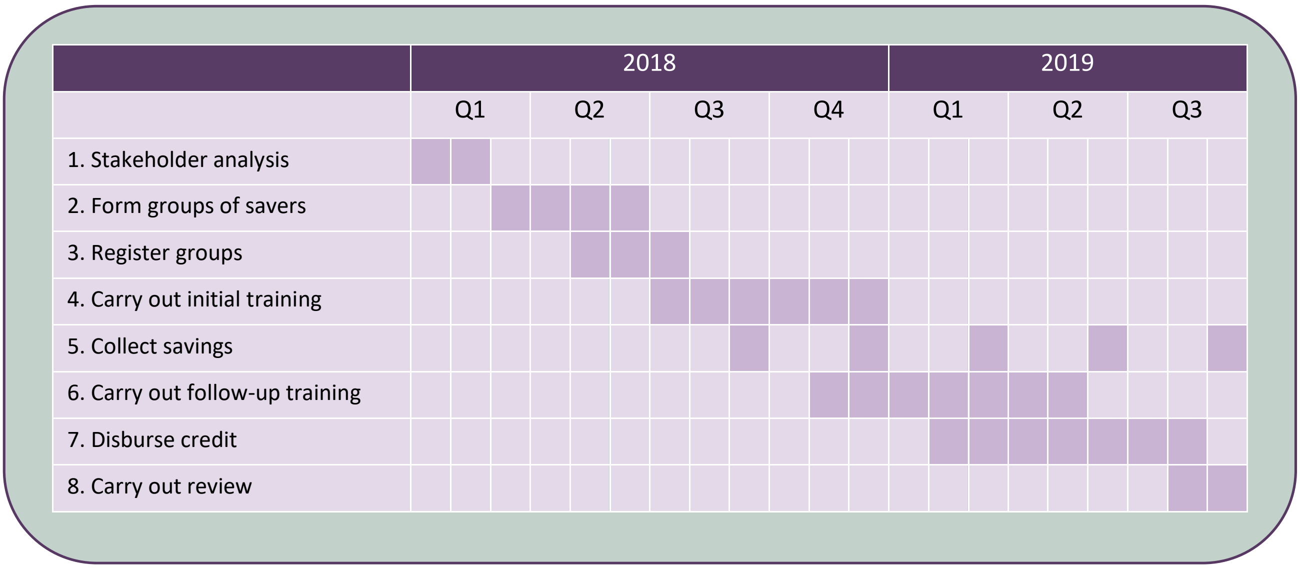
A basic monitoring report is then produced against the Gantt chart (or other type of activity plan) every week, month or quarter. Reporting usually covers each of the different activities. If the actual implementation did not match up to the plan, the plan would then be revised accordingly.

Checklists: Checklists of things to do are another common way of tracking progress. Checklists may consist of timebound activities, but they may also consist of actions that need to be taken on an ongoing and regular basis: for example reading field reports, dealing with complaints from staff or beneficiaries, or ensuring that funds are regularly disbursed on time.

Many CSOs sign up to different standards, such as Core Humanitarian Standards or NGO Codes of Conduct. These are often monitored and recorded on an ongoing basis using a set of simple checklists.

Indicators: Most M&E systems involve the development of indicators that show the achievement of outputs, outcomes and sometimes impact. Process indicators are also widely used – these help to show the internal progress made by a project or programme (for example, whether a communications strategy has been developed or whether

A Typical Gantt Chart



A Typical Indicator Tracking Sheet

Indicator	Target this quarter			Achieved this quarter			Achieved to date (cumulative)		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1. # of mosquito nets disbursed									
2. # of people trained									
3. # of community meetings held									
Other Observations:									

implementing partners have been appointed). Often, these indicators are specified in a logical framework or an alternative form of indicator plan. Indicators may also be held or duplicated in M&E plans.

A form or template used to track indicators (known as an indicator tracking sheet) would normally contain the indicator, the target for the period, and space for results to be recorded (see above). An indicator tracking sheet could also hold baseline figures for the indicator, cumulative targets, ratings for whether or not targets have been achieved, space for comments or observations, or any other relevant piece of information.

Questions: Whilst most CSOs develop basic monitoring indicators, few use questions in monitoring systems. Yet questions can often be as useful if not more so than indicators. A monitoring question is any kind of question designed to establish the progress of a project or programme, such as:

- Are project activities, such as training, being carried out well?
- Are the project services reaching those most in need?
- Are communities actively involving themselves in the projects, or are they simply passive recipients?

These kinds of questions are important as they can complement the kind of information collected through quantitative indicators. (An alternative way of doing this is to set qualitative indicators, such as *'the extent to which training is being carried out well'* or *'the extent to which project services are reaching those most in need*'). Monitoring questions should cover the issues managers need to know about in order to help them make regular decisions.

Again, a simple way of tracking this information would be to list each question on a template, and then provide space for staff to record opinions or observations on a regular basis. Sometimes, questions can be used on their own. At other times indicators are more useful. And often, both are required to provide a full picture of what is happening.

Actions: The purpose of regular project tracking – whether covering planned activities, checklists, indicators, questions or even unexpected changes – is ultimately to provide information for management decision-making. The way in which decisions are made depends on many things, including the type of organisation doing the monitoring, the type of project or programme, whether a project is participatory or not, and many other factors. But whatever the context, it is always important to have a system in place to respond to conclusion, recommendations and actions. These can range from simple operational changes – such as changing the times of meetings or adjusting the level of credit provided to different groups – to actions designed to address major concerns, such as the potential misuse of funds or concerns that some groups (e.g. people with disabilities) may be excluded from a project or programme.

Many CSOs use tracker sheets similar to the sheet above, often called a management action plan. This involves columns for recording actions, the people responsible for carrying them through, the required timeframes, the actions they have taken (or not taken), and the results of those actions. This type of action plan is also commonly used after evaluations to check which formal recommendations have been put into action.

Participatory management

The kind of monitoring required for management purposes described in this paper is relatively straightforward if one agency is implementing a simple project in a specific location. But of course things are sometimes more complex.

- Firstly, many CSOs encourage a range of different stakeholders, including beneficiaries, to be involved in the design, planning and implementation of projects. Sometimes this means that beneficiaries take responsibility for monitoring or acting on monitoring information.
- Secondly, many larger NGOs based in the North and South operate through partner CSOs. In these cases monitoring and associated management decision-making is often divided amongst many different organisations.
- Thirdly, CSOs often work through informal networks and partnerships, particularly when working in areas such as research or policy influencing.

In each case, the different stakeholders need to be very clear about who is monitoring what, and who has responsibility for acting on any findings. Sometimes this can be done informally. But in more complex situations it is important to develop clear protocols to ensure that all agencies know who is responsible for monitoring different aspects of a project or programme, what information needs to be shared with others, and who is responsible for making decisions and following through on those decisions.

Different types of monitoring

Most of the literature regarding M&E in academic circles is concerned with how to assess the results of projects and programmes. Until recently, much of this has been concerned with evaluation exclusively. Even when monitoring is mentioned it is usually in connection with the monitoring of results, which aims to monitor the changes brought about by a project or programme on a continuous basis by tracking output, outcome and (sometimes) impact indicators.

However, INTRAC regularly hears complaints from CSO staff that academic M&E debates are irrelevant to their work. CSO staff, particularly field staff, are often faced with multiple monitoring requirements which rarely receive much attention, yet are essential management processes. Some of these are as follows.

- ***Activity monitoring*** is designed to plan and track activities on a regular basis, using activity plans such as Gantt charts (see earlier diagram). In many CSOs activity planning and monitoring is carried out on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis.
- ***Financial monitoring*** is designed to track budgets, cash flows, procurements, and other financial aspects of a project, and make regular adjustments where necessary. Most project managers are expected to produce regular budget forecasts and then monitor these budgets continuously.
- ***Situation monitoring*** is sometimes known as scanning. It is concerned with monitoring changes in the local, regional or national political or socio-economic environment which might affect a project or programme.
- ***Beneficiary monitoring, or beneficiary contact monitoring*** aims to track the perceptions of project or programme beneficiaries (IFRC 2011). It often includes beneficiary feedback mechanisms and/or beneficiary complaints mechanisms. Beneficiary monitoring is a specific type of participatory M&E, and can require much time and resources to do well.
- ***Compliance monitoring*** is designed to ensure compliance with issues such as donor regulations, grant or contract requirements, government regulations and ethical standards. Many CSOs, especially those operating in humanitarian programmes, are signatories to various codes of conduct which need to be regularly monitored.
- ***Contract monitoring*** covers the monitoring of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and contracts. These often need to be closely monitored to see if they are being followed correctly. Sometimes this expands to the monitoring of key relationships, including CSO relationships with host governments or key donors. For smaller CSOs, monitoring relationships with larger CSO partners may also be considered essential for a project or programme.
- ***Quality assurance*** is about ensuring the quality of work carried out, and any products or services delivered to stakeholders. Many larger development agencies have quality assurance teams and processes that are quite separate from M&E teams.
- ***Media monitoring*** is often conducted by CSOs engaged in advocacy or policy influencing work, or those who simply want to know whether they or their work is being mentioned or quoted in the media, including social media.
- ***Logistics monitoring*** covers issues such as the purchase, allocation and maintenance of premises and transport, the use of equipment, stock-keeping, and other forms of administration.
- ***Personnel monitoring*** is concerned with monitoring the performance of staff and volunteers working on a project or programme – making sure they are performing well and that their own needs, including their professional development needs, are being met. In some situations, especially humanitarian situations, ensuring the health and safety of staff through safeguarding is also an essential element to monitor.
- ***Risk monitoring*** is concerned with the monitoring of key project or programme risks and assumptions, such as those contained within logical frameworks or similar planning tools. Many CSOs keep a risk log to monitor what is being done about risks.
- ***Action logs*** (see earlier) are designed to monitor management actions, and to see whether recommendations and decisions have been implemented or not.

Finally, it is often considered important to monitor the monitoring system. This is to make sure it is still fit for purpose, and is still delivering the type and quality of information that is necessary to enable timely management decisions.

All these areas of monitoring are regularly used by CSOs to ensure that projects and programmes are managed in a timely and effective way. Yet when people talk or write about M&E they often fail to recognise how important these functions are.

> *"With all the time spent on monitoring different aspects of a project it is no wonder CSO staff in the field have little time to engage in debates on whether learning or accountability is most important for M&E"*

Further reading and resources

Separate papers dealing with some of the issues raised in this paper, including adaptive management, M&E plans and participatory M&E, can be accessed by clicking on the links below. There is also a lot of overlap between this paper and one on monitoring, which can also be accessed below.

- Adaptive management
- M&E plans
- Monitoring
- Participatory M&E
- Learning
- Accountability

The IFRC M&E guide referenced below contains much useful information on monitoring and evaluation for project or programme management. It is specific to IFRC, but contains many forms, tools and templates which could easily be adapted by others. It is freely available from the IFRC website at http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/monitoring/IFRC-ME-Guide-8-2011.pdf.

References

- IFRC (2011). *Project/programme Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Guide. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*. Geneva, 2011.

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INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.

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