Managing for Impact in Rural Development

A Guide for Project M&E
Credits

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ISBN
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#### Index
The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and its partners in developing countries share the challenging mission of enabling the rural poor to overcome their poverty. A partnership which takes shape primarily through hundreds of rural development projects and programmes at grass-roots level, often in the poorest and most remote regions of the world.

Although the performance of these projects has improved in many aspects over the years, external evaluations continue to report weaknesses in their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, in particular in the way impact M&E is carried out and used at project management and policy level. The need for support is also evident from the numerous requests that IFAD receives each year from its partners for assistance in M&E system design and operation.

In line with the IFAD Action Plan 2000-2002, which seeks to “improve impact assessment”, this new practical guide was developed through a yearlong consultative process with its potential users: project M&E officers, managers, designers and supervisors. Its purpose is to facilitate the development and use of effective and participatory M&E systems as tools for impact-oriented management, shared learning processes and accountability.

As such, it is an integral part of our global effort to improve the performance and monitor the results of our common initiatives to strengthen the capacity of the rural poor and their organisations, improve equitable access to productive resources and increase access to financial services and markets.

Lennart Båge
President
International Fund for Agricultural Development
After a long consultation process and much work by a variety of M&E specialists from all regions of IFAD operations, I am pleased to present the IFAD Practical Guide for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Development Projects.

The process began in 2000 when the Fund’s Office of Evaluation and Studies conducted a stocktaking exercise, which covered a decade of IFAD experience with M&E at project level. After which, a comparative review was undertaken of the strategies and approaches to M&E systems at project level of several major development agencies. While the stocktaking exercise observed a general weakness in most M&E systems, the comparative review concluded that there is substantial material on M&E concepts and theories, although there remains a lack of practical resource kits on the methodologies and processes at operational level.

As such, the overriding goal of the guide is to improve the impact of IFAD-funded projects, through the introduction of effective M&E systems. It focuses on a learning approach to management that uses achievements and problems to improve decision-making and accountability. This requires creating an M&E system that helps primary stakeholders, implementing partners and project staff to learn together in order to improve their development interventions on a continual basis. As the ultimate objective is to ensure the maximum possible benefit for the rural poor, they are the ones best placed to assess project impact and must therefore be considered full partners in any future M&E. The guide also suggests ideas for implementing this and other forms of participatory M&E.

The primary target audience is composed of staff from project management units, in particular project directors and M&E officers, together with their implementation partners, such as, public services, NGOs and CBOs. The guide is also aimed at technical consultants and supervisors from co-operating institutions. Because the effectiveness of M&E systems also depends on the decisions taken during project design, specific sections of the guide provide advice to project designers, including IFAD staff and their consultants.

This guide presents a number of original features that I believe could contribute to its success and usefulness:

- It has been developed together with its potential users through a consultative process lasting over a year. It addresses their practical problems, starting from their current M&E practices, however rudimentary, and whenever possible uses examples of good practices from IFAD-funded and other rural development projects.

- The guide is geared to the specific context, procedures and partnerships of IFAD supported operations. It emphasises participatory processes throughout, and proposes options that can be adapted to the requirements of project managements in different regional and national contexts.

- The guide is organised in eight stand-alone modules that are tailored to the needs of different categories of users with specific yet differing monitoring responsibilities and tasks.

- The guide is also available to the public in a user-friendly, electronic format on the IFAD web page (www.ifad.org/evaluation).
Furthermore, the guide is not a stand-alone initiative. In fact, it forms part of broader spectrum of activities which include, more specifically, improvement of the logical framework approaches in project design and supervision, training, translation of the guide into local languages and the development of regional M&E support networks which take stock of IFAD’s experience with the PREVAL (Programme for Strengthening the M&E Capacity of IFAD-funded Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean). This regional customisation should further adapt the contents of the guide to the needs of its users and their feedback will be incorporated in future versions.

I trust that the guide will be a valuable tool and contribution to the enhancement of impact assessment and achievement in IFAD-supported projects.

Luciano Lavizzari
Director
Office of Evaluation and Studies
### Navigating the Guide

#### Are you responsible for managing the project or a project component?

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### Are you responsible for providing guidance, supervision and support to the project?

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<td>Section 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
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- Brazil. C. Jurema, A. Medrado Brasileiro, D. Andrade dos Santos, C. Ribeiro Cardoso

- Colombia. M.O. Lizarazo, L. Isaacs, A. Rojas

- Ecuador. J. Orbe, D. Quilumbaqui

- El Salvador. M. Ponce, J.A. Torres, M. Quesada, E. Ancheta, G. Colunga, J. Santos Castillo


- Guatemala. C. Mas, M. Mérida


- Mali. C. Kamaté, Y. Diarra, Mr. Sako, M. Coulibaly, A. Karam, Mr. Sakaponé, M. Baba Diatiké, A. Traoré, A. Kene, S. Fatoumata, F. Kamara, A. Traoré, B. Thiero, O. Traoré, F. Diara, N. Keita, B. Doumbia, H. Diallo, B. Togola, M. Nadio, M. Moutairou, E. Boka, I. Dabo Ndiaye

- Nicaragua. J.L. Sandino

- Peru. C. Sotomayor, J. Solórzano, E. Mar, I. Loaiza, T. Samagoa


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<th>Definition</th>
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<td>APR</td>
<td>annual project review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWPB</td>
<td>annual work plan and budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>below poverty line</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBA</td>
<td>cost-benefit analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>community-based organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>central coordination unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>cooperating institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>COSOP</td>
<td>Country Strategic Opportunities Paper</td>
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<td>CPM</td>
<td>country portfolio manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>curriculum vitae (résumé)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>district council</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPF</td>
<td>district project facilitator</td>
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<td>DT</td>
<td>district team</td>
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<tr>
<td>FUG</td>
<td>forestry user group</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>geographic information system</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>global positioning system</td>
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<tr>
<td>HYVs</td>
<td>high-yielding varieties</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICGs</td>
<td>income-generating activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agricultural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>LFA</td>
<td>logical framework approach</td>
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<td>MIS</td>
<td>management information system</td>
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<td>MOVs</td>
<td>means of verification</td>
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<td>MTE</td>
<td>mid-term evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTR</td>
<td>mid-term review</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<td>MU</td>
<td>monitoring unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTCU</td>
<td>national technical coordination unit</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCU</td>
<td>programme coordination unit</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>project director</td>
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<td>PIM</td>
<td>participatory impact monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM&amp;E</td>
<td>participatory monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<td>PMU</td>
<td>project management unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNGO</td>
<td>participating NGO (i.e. implementing partner)</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>participatory rural appraisal</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHG</td>
<td>self-help group</td>
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<td>SOF</td>
<td>Special Operations Fund</td>
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<td>SWOT</td>
<td>strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats</td>
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A GUIDE FOR PROJECT M&E ACRONYMS

TOR terms of reference
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS United Nations Office for Project Services
WB World Bank
WUA water users' association

Projects mentioned by name in the Guide

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<td>APPTDP</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh Participatory Tribal Development Project</td>
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<td>Cuchumatanes Highlands Rural Development Project</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
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<td>DDSP</td>
<td>District Development Support Programme</td>
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<td>FODESA</td>
<td>Sahelian Areas Development Fund Programme</td>
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<td>KAEMP</td>
<td>Agricultural and Environmental Management Project</td>
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<td>PIDP</td>
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Introducing the M&E Guide
This Guide has been written to help project managers and M&E staff improve the quality of M&E in IFAD-supported projects.

The Guide focuses on how M&E can support project management and engage project stakeholders in understanding project progress, learning from achievements and problems, and agreeing on how to improve both strategy and operations.

The main functions of M&E are: ensuring improvement-oriented critical reflection, learning to maximise the impact of rural development projects, and showing this impact to be accountable.

The Guide is meant to improve M&E in IFAD-supported projects, as a study found that most projects have a fairly low standard of M&E.

The Guide provides comprehensive advice on how to set up and implement an M&E system, plus background ideas that underpin the suggestions.
1.1 About the Guide

The aim of IFAD and its partnerships is to enable the rural poor to overcome poverty. This puts social mobilisation and participation of the poor upfront in conceiving and implementing development initiatives. If they are not, then relevance and sustainability of impact will be compromised. The collective experiences of partnerships between the poor, the state, NGOs, and funding organisations need to be continually assessed in order to take systematic corrective action. This is the prime purpose of monitoring and evaluation.

This Guide is about using monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to improve the impact of IFAD-supported projects. The focus is on a learning approach to M&E that uses achievements and problems for better decision-making and accountability. It requires creating an M&E system that helps primary stakeholders, implementing partners and project staff learn together in order to improve their development interventions on a continual basis. Because the ultimate objective is to ensure the maximum possible benefit for the rural poor, they are the ones best placed to assess project impact. The Guide suggests ideas for implementing this and other forms of participatory M&E.

M&E is a management tool for those who manage anything from a small project component to an entire project. Setting up a good M&E system requires careful thinking about overall project management and, particularly, how to manage the linkages between different project elements and partners. Therefore the Guide focuses on practical ideas that can help to manage for impact. Many of the issues faced in project management or when setting up a useful M&E system are affected by the original project design. So, the Guide deals with good project design and management practices – but only from an M&E perspective.

The Guide will help project implementers, including primary stakeholders:

- clarify what impact a project is expected to have for the rural poor and how this will be achieved;
- decide how progress and impact will be assessed;
- gather and analyse the necessary information for tracking progress and impact;
- explain the reasons for success and failure and agree on how to use this understanding to improve future action.

In a nutshell, this is what M&E is all about.
The Guide has been written for four main audiences:

- Managers: the people responsible for managing the various aspects of project implementation. This includes the project director, managers of project components and the responsible managers of partner or contracting organisations who are implementing a specific element of the project;

- M&E staff: the staff of a project or implementing partners and contractors who have responsibilities for setting up and/or implementing M&E systems;

- Consultants: people providing external assistance on project design, M&E and information management;

- IFAD and cooperating institution staff: anyone in these organisations who is providing guidance, supervision or support to the project.

Due to the many audiences, the Guide has been structured to provide readers with different levels of detail appropriate to their needs. To know which section is appropriate to the tasks you face, see “Navigating the Guide”, at the beginning of the Guide and Section 1.3.

People often feel overwhelmed and confused by M&E due to the many ways to undertake it and also because it is often assumed that anyone can “just do it”. This Guide recognises that M&E is a professional field in its own right. Indeed, people are not expected to be agronomists, veterinarians, irrigation engineers or accountants when they have no training and no experience. Yet it is often unfairly expected that anyone with minimal support should be able to do a good job at M&E. The Guide aims to provide both the key concepts and the practical details needed to make M&E work.

The ideas in this Guide are not a mandatory M&E system with which all projects must comply. The Guide describes what is considered - and has proven to be - good practice in project M&E, with examples from experiences in many different contexts. You will not find, for example, a set of common categories of impact or fixed sets of indicators or a list of indispensable methods. Having options is critical, as each IFAD-supported project is unique. Nevertheless, good M&E does need to meet a minimum set of requirements and standards. This Guide will discuss these requirements and standards, while indicating where options are possible.

No document, including this Guide, can hope to solve all problems of inadequate M&E. Other supporting measures are needed, including training, technical assistance, incentives and adequate resource allocation. In particular, improvement-oriented critical reflection is needed by those involved. These topics are discussed in detail in Sections 7 and 8.

### 1.2 The Basis of the Guide

#### 1.2.1 Enhancing and Understanding Impact

Just what is “impact” in rural development? IFAD defines impact as changes - positive or negative, intended or unintended - in the lives of the rural people as they and their partners perceive, as well as sustainability-enhancing change in their environment, to which the IFAD-supported project has contributed.

Impact is often used to refer to the highest goal-level achievements of a project, such as “improved food security” and “increased household income”. However, any significant effect on poverty takes several years to emerge, longer than most IFAD-supported projects.
Accordingly, IFAD uses impact in a broader sense to refer to a wide range of observable changes that help reduce poverty. For example, “adoption of improved farming techniques” is an important intermediate impact. So are “building linkages between local committees, fishermen’s associations and formal management bodies in ways that have ensured their participation in decision-making processes affecting their wellbeing”. Impact is clearly a broad concept.

Local ownership and building capacity are often critical interim impacts that encourage self-management for development amongst the poor. So is the reduction of vulnerability. A main cause of poverty, vulnerability is not just about food insecurity or the inability to meet basic needs. It concerns people’s inability to influence decisions affecting their lives, negotiate collectively for better terms of trade and services, stop corruption and violence, and make organisations – government or non-governmental, public or private – accountable to them. Impact has many faces.

The key idea in this Guide is to use M&E to help manage the resources and activities of a project to enhance impacts along a continuum, from short term to long term. This requires clarity in the project about the desired goals, and vigilance to understand if lower-level outputs are contributing to higher-level goals ones, amidst other influencing factors. It also requires conscious effort to learn to identify corrective actions that could further enhance impact.

1.2.2 Supporting the Rural Poor

Working on the details of project management, design and M&E may sometimes push the rural poor to the background. But remember that this is the prime reason why development interventions receive IFAD funding. More than 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty – one out of every five people. It is the 900 million of these who live in rural areas that IFAD funding aims to help. Project staff and partners can claim success when society’s most marginalised people themselves indicate how they have benefited directly.

To enable this, M&E must build on existing inspiration, creativity and motivation. This means creating opportunities for the poor to make their own judgements about the value of projects and how to improve them. Good M&E can provide evidence of general impact. It can also capture human stories of personal change that are needed for governments and their constituents to continue supporting rural development.

Keeping track of the details of project implementation and gathering good information about what has been achieved are very important. But in the end, what makes the difference is how people interact, how ideas are shared and developed, and – in so doing – how people are motivated and supported to learn and contribute to the best of their ability. Rural people’s aspirations and their own development processes must be at the heart of managing for impact and M&E.

1.2.3 Increasing Participation

In May 2000, an IFAD workshop on impact achievement stated, “that participation means more than just beneficiary contribution to project execution, rather that it should encompass all the stakeholders and be formalised at all stages of the project cycle”. This clearly includes M&E. IFAD-supported projects entail varying degrees of participation. So, developing participatory M&E systems means that, once the basics of M&E are understood, participatory M&E is defined and ways are worked out to introduce it. This is a basic principle of the Guide.
Generally, widespread recognition of weak M&E systems has led to a search for alternatives that are more inclusive of primary stakeholders. For example, project staff in Latin America had such a strong feeling that their monitoring system was performing only a control function that they discarded the entire system midway through the project. They developed a new M&E system based on the principles of participation, decentralisation and flexibility. In another project, in southern Africa, contracts between communities and the project formed the basis of transparency about the rights and responsibilities attached to participation – including M&E. The Guide describes many aspects of participatory M&E.

Participation applies not only to primary stakeholders. It means giving more space to grass-roots organisations, banks and other private enterprises, and others, as implementing partners. The role of project management is one of facilitation between diverse partners, rather than one of steering from a central decision-making position. Each stakeholder group has its own information needs and ways of working. This includes providing feedback to funding agencies. Such information does not have to be collected, analysed and fed back by primary stakeholders. An M&E system run entirely by and for primary stakeholders is not sufficient to meet all project needs. The M&E system is for all stakeholders.

1.2.4 Improving Management by Strengthening M&E

M&E is not – and cannot be – a substitute for good project management. For M&E to succeed, it needs to be driven by managers' needs for information, their use of the information and their desire to create a learning environment. M&E in any project will therefore only ever be as good as the quality of overall management.

Yet M&E is indispensable for good management. The Guide presents how M&E can fulfil this function. While the Guide touches on the broad idea of managing for impact, it is not a general guide to all aspects of project management.

Inadequate M&E has two consequences:

- limited learning by implementers about the project's progress, opportunities and problems; consequently, the limited ability of those involved to correct operations and strategy, leading to sub-optimal impact on poverty reduction;
- unclear impact performance, so limited accountability to funding agencies and to primary stakeholders of projects in terms of their stated goals. As one project consultant put it, “If there is no method for tracking activities or problems or the impact of activities, how can projects justify their existence?”

A collection of IFAD studies on project experiences with M&E highlighted a series of problems (see Box 1-1). Some problems have external causes that lie beyond the control of the project and restrict project activities, such as disasters or institutional environment. Others have conceptual causes, which revolve, for example, around diverging and unclear perceptions of M&E, methodology and analysis. The rest have operational causes due, for instance, to insufficient personnel or the (non-)integration of M&E by project staff and other stakeholders.

M&E feeds the whole process of assessment both of change in the lives of the poor and of the performance of IFAD and other stakeholders in relation to their obligations, functions and relationships. It looks not only at the specific project or programme but also contributes to advocacy, policy dialogue and updating understanding on poverty and its reduction. Effective M&E can:

- provide managers with information they need for day-to-day decisions in the ever-changing
contexts of projects;
• provide key stakeholders with the information needed to guide the project strategy towards achieving the goal and objectives;
• provide early warning of problematic activities and processes that need corrective action;
• help empower primary stakeholders by creating opportunities for them to reflect critically on the project's direction and help decide on improvements;
• build understanding and capacity amongst those involved in the project;
• motivate and stimulate learning amongst those committed to making the project a success;
• assess progress and so enable accountability requirements to be met.

Box 1.1. Common problems with M&E in IFAD-supported projects

In 2000, a series of studies on M&E\(^1\) showed that few IFAD-supported projects have monitoring systems (including the undertaking of studies and ongoing evaluation) that are able to provide timely, relevant and good quality information on project reach and impact on the well-being and livelihood strategies of the target group. Impact assessment in particular has not been institutionalised at either the project or corporate level in IFAD. Government departments frequently have no systematic evaluation system, but instead simply investigate projects attracting official concern. Project staff know that when questions are asked about the impact of specific activities, the reports presented are a summary of general impressions rather than systematic and thorough analysis. The following common problems were identified:

• inadequate understanding of and attention to M&E in project design and subsequently inadequate resource allocation and hierarchical organisation of decision-making and analysis;
• lack of commitment to monitoring by project staff and implementing partners. This leads to delays in implementing monitoring systems and to lack of information use by project management;
• monitoring seen as an obligation imposed from outside, with project staff mechanically filling in forms for managers and the project managers seeing monitoring only as a form of data collection in the process of writing reports for donors;
• irrelevant and poor quality information produced through monitoring that focused on physical and financial aspects and ignores project outreach, effect and impact;
• almost no attention to monitoring and evaluation needs and potentials of other stakeholders such as beneficiaries and community-based and other local cooperating institutions;
• very few internal project reviews or ongoing evaluations, with adjustments triggered mainly by external evaluations or supervisions;
• widespread lack of integration and cooperation between project M&E and project management (e.g., via the AWPB and logframe), with no clear, mutually agreed-upon guidelines;
• M&E documentation that does not address or resolve identified problems;
• over-ambitious monitoring systems, with too much being asked in terms of information and methods;
• poor use of participatory and qualitative M&E methods, due to limited capacity and inability to see the need for such information;
• M&E staff with insufficient relevant skills and experiences, and making little effort to fill the capacity gap;
• differentiation of monitoring from evaluation activities, with evaluation being contracted out. This leads to M&E not being an integrated system for improvement-oriented critical reflection.

1.3 Using the Guide

1.3.1 Navigating the Guide

Because this Guide has been written for all those people who have specific yet different M&E-related responsibilities and tasks, it has been produced as a set of “modules” or sections (see Box 1-2). This makes it possible for you to focus on the material that is relevant for your needs at a particular point in time. You might want to copy parts of the Guide on particular M&E functions and share them with colleagues and partners.

The Guide contains five tools to help you find your way around:

1. a detailed table of contents (see beginning of Guide), plus a section-specific table of contents inside each booklet;
2. a road map of the eight core Sections of the Guide (see Figure 1-1);
3. an audience-specific list of recommended sections for specific M&E responsibilities (see “Navigating the Guide” at the beginning of the Guide);
4. a detailed index at the end of the Guide;
5. the first pages of Sections 2 to 8 are a summary of the section and can help you decide what part of the section is most relevant.

Figure 1-1. A road map of the core sections of the Guide
1.3.2 Making this Guide Work for You

Can a book of good M&E ideas really make a difference? No. Written words alone can never change practice. It is the people using the ideas who will make the difference. In other words, this Guide is not a guarantee that all project M&E will proceed smoothly. More is needed than a simple reading. You – as manager, M&E coordinator, consultant, cooperating institution or IFAD staff member – will need to take the ideas and adapt them to your own contexts, competencies and concerns. This will inevitably require a period of trial-and-error, the hallmark of an adaptive project.

A new project faces the largest task of all. Every aspect of the learning process has to be conceived in both general and operational terms, before being tried out. New projects, as well as ongoing ones, should not be discouraged by descriptions of good and comprehensive M&E systems. Small steps can be made in triggering and improving project learning – with significant results – before a fuller system is in place. Thus the Guide offers simple options for those taking first steps, alongside more sophisticated options for those who are further down the M&E path.
1.4 The Nature of IFAD-supported Projects

In terms of managing for impact and setting up the M&E system, any IFAD project will be influenced by three aspects: the project cycle, the main stakeholders and their inter-relationships, and the relationship of the project to government processes of the lending country.

1.4.1 The Project Cycle for IFAD-Supported Projects

“Project cycle” is the name for various steps in the life of a funded intervention – from the initial idea to the phasing out of operations and the final evaluation. All IFAD-supported projects follow a particular cycle of steps (see Figure 1-2). Several of these happen before the project is even operating.

Figure 1-2. The project cycle for IFAD-supported projects
Typically, the project process starts with an initial intention to work in a region, as discussed in a Country Strategic Opportunities Paper (COSOP). This phase involves IFAD staff, consultants and key government departments. They examine their strategy for that country and the needs to be addressed, based on experiences and current government and donor strategies. The COSOP that is produced includes two or three ideas for a future project. No M&E-related issues are broached.

Internal IFAD discussions focus on the ideas from the COSOP and produce an inception paper. This paper describes what appears to be the best idea from the COSOP and potential strategic areas of action. As in the previous step, no M&E-related issues are broached.

The formulation phase is critical to project design. It involves a three- to four-week in-country consultancy by a team that includes national officials and IFAD-contracted consultants. The formulation phase results in an appraisal report. The appraisal report is the documented description of the project aims and strategy. Recommendations are made for the responsible government department and about the possible implementing strategies, agencies and organisations. The appraisal report should and usually does describe the suggested M&E strategy, key operational relationships and pre-negotiations, logical framework matrix, draft annual work plan and budget (AWPB), the design of the start-up phase, and a matrix detailing responsibilities. This report is crucial in laying the basis for the overall M&E system and approach.

The start-up phase may commence up to two years after appraisal, and it is inaugurated with a short start-up workshop. Then project management takes hold of the project idea, as outlined in the appraisal report, and starts mobilising partners and resources for implementation. In this phase, the implementation unit and collaboration arrangements are put in place, initial staff/partner training can take place (such as on M&E), the logframe matrix is updated to the current context, and M&E consultants are commonly hired to help design the operational M&E details for the project. Partner agencies are brought in to contribute to the development of the M&E process. If the loan agreement has been delayed, then the project can use the Special Operations Facility to start early activities. However, thorough the appraisal report, it is not detailed enough to guide the M&E strategy during implementation. Many more weeks of work are required to develop operational plans. Start-up provides the most critical opportunity for the project partnership to detail the M&E processes and procedures.

It is during the main implementation phase that projects reap the benefits of a good M&E process, which feeds plan adjustments via reflection, annual project reviews with primary stakeholders, and supervision missions from the cooperating institution. Adjustments are made to project operations and M&E. Implementation is guided by annual work plans and budgets (AWPBs), and is recorded in quarterly and mid-year reports.

The mid-term review (or evaluation) is a critical learning moment for the implementing partners, when more strategic changes of direction are identified and agreed upon. Implementation plans are adapted and design assumptions are discussed and validated and/or modified. Participants in this phase are staff from the project and implementing partners, representatives of the target groups, cooperating institutions, external consultants and, at times, IFAD staff.

During phasing-out, the basis for sustainability of impacts is consolidated. Reflections with primary stakeholders should identify key changes in local people's lives, as well as the potential sustainability of impact.

The completion phase offers the opportunity to draw lessons, either for a project extension or for other initiatives on similar themes elsewhere. New insights on rural development change are gained by reflecting on the project impact and process as compared to its initial design. This is an important review process as a considerable number of projects move on to a second phase, and reorientation will be based on learning from their past.
1.4.2 Key Stakeholders and their M&E Role

A rural development project is located in a web of relationships between many different stakeholders. Most IFAD-supported projects deal with eight key groups: local people, people’s organisations, project management, implementing partners, cooperating institutions, responsible government departments, consultants and IFAD staff. These relationships need to be established, understood and managed well so that each stakeholder group can make the best possible contribution.

Primary Stakeholders – the Local People

Local women, men and children are pivotal to a project and its learning process. They are the primary stakeholders as their needs are the focus of the project and their views on impact are what count. This is a very diverse group and most projects specify target groups, such as “marginalised farmers”, “smallholders” or “the landless” in the project area. Local people are increasingly acting as full partners in project initiatives, rather than passive beneficiaries. Most projects aim to strengthen self-reliant development, so seek local participation in project design and implementation and assessment of the findings. If project M&E builds on existing communication and learning processes, it can enhance and enrich these.

Grassroots Organisations

Grassroots organisations, at community and higher levels, are important partners. They provide invaluable insights on priorities and appropriate processes during the design phase, and undertake some of the implementation of the project and/or M&E. One of their most valuable roles is in facilitating participatory processes during implementation. Project management works with grassroots organisations to create opportunities for local people to participate meaningfully in M&E activities, such as through participatory baseline studies, local impact assessments or annual project reviews. Working with them increases local ownership of the project and thus the likelihood of a sustained impact.

Project Management

Project management is the organisational pivot for implementation. Each project organises management in its own way. One project might have only five staff in the management unit and with most management functions (including M&E) decentralised to implementing partners. Another may have a large, more centralised management and implementation unit with, for example, 20 M&E staff. Local community members can be active in project management. Project management is responsible for ensuring that the project as a whole has clear and relevant plans, reviewing and approving work, and ensuring financial flows and reporting. The project achieves its intended impacts if management adequately supports the implementing partners to deliver quality work. The project director and M&E coordinator are responsible for establishing and operating the reflection and learning processes and for reporting to supervising bodies, funding agencies and local people.

Implementing Partners

Projects are implemented not only through grassroots organisations but also through government services, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and commercial operators, such as banks. In more participatory projects, these groups often have a catalytic and advisory function since decision-making lies with the primary stakeholders. Project management may ask for bids before selecting implementation partners, or these partners may be already specified in the appraisal report. Partners are guided by contracts on their responsibilities, standards of work and style of operation. All partners are responsible for monitoring the activities they implement. Sometimes evaluations are subcontracted to assess longer-term impacts or to institutionalise annual participatory impact assessments.
Cooperating (or Supervising) Institutions

Once a basic project design is in place and the responsibilities of government agencies are clarified, a cooperating institution (CI) is contracted. Its role is to supervise the loan process and provide technical and financial support to the project during implementation. It should also provide methodological M&E support. CIs report project progress, problems and recommended actions to the funding agencies, including IFAD. Common CIs are UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services), the World Bank and regional development banks. For some projects, IFAD does the supervision directly. CIs may also be co-funders.

Responsible Government Ministry

Each project is placed under the responsibility of a ministry, which is often the Ministry of Agriculture or Finance (or equivalent). This ministry is the loan holder and is frequently the seat of the steering committee for the project if one is created. It often appoints the project director in consultation with IFAD. It is usually a co-funder of the project. The responsible government ministry does not always play an active role in project M&E, but receives all project reports. Key ministry officials will need to agree on any significant changes to a project’s strategy, should this option emerge during an MTR/MTE (mid-term review or evaluation) or as a result of a supervision mission. Project-based M&E is critical for any feedback to policymakers.

Consultants/Technical Advisors

Most projects use several externally contracted consultants or technical advisors at various moments. These consultants, in discussion with IFAD, design the project and thus greatly influence its focus and mode of operation, including laying down the basis of project M&E. At start-up, they also often play a key role in designing various aspects of the M&E system and related capacity-building efforts. Consultants are contracted by IFAD for MTRs/MTEs and often for interim evaluations.

IFAD

Most project directors will know at least two people in IFAD: the country portfolio manager (CPM) and the Office of Evaluation officer responsible for the country in which the project is located. Contact is mostly with the CPM, both directly and via the CI. The CPM guides the project through IFAD internal procedures up to implementation, and facilitates all relationships during the project life, including consultant contracting. The CPM’s role in M&E lies in overseeing the quality of the project design, including the M&E plan. The CPM seeks ways to embed IFAD’s priorities during implementation, such as participation of primary stakeholders, and often organises MTRs or interim evaluations. CPMs participate on IFAD’s behalf in the project management partnership. For some projects, they are involved in direct supervision.

1.4.3 The Specific Importance of Government Processes

Of particular influence on project partnerships and processes is “the government”. It is to governments that loans are given, with governments that ideas are developed, and mainly through governments that implementation takes place. Governments are the agencies responsible for impact achievement of the loan, are partners in design, and are often the home of project management.
Three levels of government are critical to most IFAD-supported projects:

1. national level: for COSOP, project design, loan negotiations, and loan repayment;
2. regional level (district, province, state): for supporting implementation with management decisions and memorandums of understanding with government organisations operating at a regional level;
3. local level: for implementation by agencies in local government.

Besides these different levels, each project is likely to deal with various ministries, as most projects are active in several sectors. Special project steering groups may be created within the government system to coordinate actions and policies related to the project, although membership may include others, including primary stakeholders.

Working with government as a critical partner means dealing with its capacities, limitations and the politics to which all governments worldwide are subjected. Many projects must handle frequent policy changes and staff discontinuity over time. Some may be faced with the challenge of different levels of government working with different policy priorities. Policy changes can create havoc for projects if, for example, the mandate of a key department changes. Project management is rarely an autonomous unit but often operates in a ministry with its own specific ways of working. This can create considerable tensions if the lines of responsibility and those of decision-making power are blurred or diverge.

From an M&E perspective, government may require integrating the project monitoring and learning systems with those it currently uses. If these are inadequate, then it may require efforts to set up M&E that extend beyond the project.
1.5 Implications of Changing Approaches to Development

The thinking behind development intervention is constantly evolving. Many projects used to focus on expert input to design infrastructure- and technology-development oriented projects, often with little input from primary stakeholders. Over time, attention has moved towards more participation of primary stakeholders in project design and towards strategies that build capacity and empower people to direct and manage their own development ideas.

Such changes require all stakeholders to accept the consequences of participation, including uncertainty, politicisation and shared decision-making. The idea of blueprint planning has given way to more flexible, process-oriented and adaptive approaches to project implementation. More recently, the trends of decentralisation and privatisation have led to more dispersed models of project implementation. This means less emphasis on centralised project management units, with implementation being managed by primary stakeholders and private contractors.

These changes have five significant implications for M&E:

1. M&E can play a role recognised to help and empower local people to control their own development, with critical self-evaluations of collective experiences reinforcing their capacity for self-management. M&E can thus direct information systems not only upward but also downward;

2. more adaptive and flexible approaches to project implementation actually require better M&E systems, as the whole model is based on being responsive to feedback from primary stakeholders and to changing circumstances;

3. monitoring and evaluating capacity development and empowerment-oriented initiatives require different approaches to M&E than assessing infrastructure development or technology transfer;

4. in a decentralised and privatised context, attention needs to be given to building M&E capacity within the implementing partner groups, rather than just focusing on M&E in a project management unit, thus making M&E a vehicle for addressing questions of governance. However, sub-contracting M&E functions carries risks for corrective actions if it dilutes a project's access to critical information and capacity for reflection;

5. the importance of downward accountability and stakeholder participation - particularly of primary stakeholders - in developing, implementing and improving the M&E process becomes essential.

IFAD-supported projects encompass a broad spectrum of approaches to development, from the more conventional to the more innovative. The Guide has been written from the perspective of an approach to M&E that emphasises stakeholder participation, critical reflection for learning and flexible implementation. These ideas have been presented in a way that makes them applicable to a wide range of IFAD-supported projects, whether new or existing, conventional or innovative.
Further Reading

IFAD. International Fund for Agricultural Development. See Website at: http://www.ifad.org. For information on IFAD’s M&E strategy, including information on its Office of Evaluation and Studies, see: http://www.ifad.org/evaluation. To access IFAD's evaluation reports online in various languages, see: http://www.ifad.org/list_eval.asp.

PREVAL. Programa para el Fortalecimiento de la Capacidad de Seguimiento y Evaluación de los Proyectos FIDA en América Latina y el Caribe. Comprehensive Spanish Website on M&E for IFAD-supported projects in Latin America: http://www.prevai.org

List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Using M&E to Manage for Impact
This Section discusses how M&E can be used to manage projects in order to maximise their impact on poverty reduction.

- Managing for impact involves four interrelated functions:
  - guiding the overall project strategy
  - creating a learning environment
  - ensuring effective project operations
  - developing and using the M&E system

- Setting up M&E to support “managing for impact” requires understanding key management functions and information needs.

- Impact-oriented M&E is most effective when stakeholders are involved in a creative process of learning how to improve the project on a continual basis.

- To make M&E participatory requires that different stakeholders analyse how they can best be involved and what they need in order to participate in a meaningful way.
2.1 An Overview of Using M&E to Manage for Impact

Rural development projects aim to improve the lives of the rural poor. As manager of a project or part of it, do you always know what impact you are having and why? Learning about successes and failures through regular monitoring and critical reflection is fundamental for guiding your intervention towards achieving maximum impact. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is the heart of “managing for impact” (see Box 2-1).

“Managing for impact” means you need to respond to changing circumstances and increased understanding by adapting the project so that it will be more likely to achieve its intended impacts. Such adaptation may entail small changes to activities or larger strategic revisions. Each project is being managed for impact under its own set of constraints. Keeping updated on the internal and external constraints will help you have realistic expectations of what can be adjusted and achieved.

To manage adaptively, project implementers and managers need to:

• understand the project design;
• gather and analyse relevant information to make good decisions;
• facilitate learning with all key stakeholders; and
• negotiate required changes.

Box 2-1. Defining monitoring and evaluation

**Evaluation**, in its broadest sense, simply means “to assess or judge the value or worth of something”. In practice, this means that implementers need a questioning attitude for continual assessment. Evaluation events are often more periodic and ask more fundamental questions about the overall progress and direction of a project. Self-evaluation processes combine well with external evaluations.

**Monitoring** helps continual self-evaluation by providing data to generate insights through formal and informal processes. Formal monitoring involves gathering data about chosen indicators and performance questions. Informal monitoring is about valuing and sharing impressions from chats with stakeholders and from observations in the field. Monitoring focuses on regular information-gathering and the frequent checking of short-term progress, with analysis about implications for the project.

There is no consensus about terminology in planning and M&E. This Guide does not make an absolute distinction between “monitoring” and “evaluation” because, in practice, the two processes overlap and are part of a systematic participatory learning process. For example, if regular monitoring reveals that things are not going as expected, you might find it necessary to undertake a more thorough, thematic evaluation to understand why and know what changes can be made.
Managing for impact is only possible if you have reliable information about the progress of activities and their outcomes, the reasons for success and failure, and the context in which activities are taking place. This information is the output of your M&E procedures. Analysing this information with key stakeholders can support good decisions that improve the project. Only when information helps the project reduce poverty more effectively will an M&E system be worthwhile. Taking poverty seriously has implications for M&E, as RDRS (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service) in Bangladesh is aware. With the need to recruit more selectively from severely impoverished groups, it is moving to monitor individual households rather than credit groups. This will allow the organisation to improve its social accountability but also its services to the poor of northern Bangladesh.

2.1.1 The Four Elements of Managing for Impact

To know if you are managing for impact, check Figure 2-1 to see if you and other implementing partners are putting in place the four basic elements that will give you the information and insights you need.

1. **Guiding the Project Strategy for Poverty Impact** - understanding the goals and objectives of the project and then allocating the available resources and guiding relationships between stakeholders to maximise impacts.

2. **Creating a Learning Environment** - inspiring and helping those involved with the project to reflect critically on progress, to learn from mistakes and to generate ideas for making improvements.

3. **Ensuring Effective Operations** - planning, organising and checking staff inputs, equipment, partner contracts, financial resources, (bi-)annual work plans, and communications to implement activities effectively and efficiently.

4. **Developing and Using the M&E System** - designing and implementing information gathering and reflective learning processes to generate insights that help you to improve operations and strategic directions.

Table 2-1 illustrates how an organisation may or may not put these four ideas into practice. It can be used as a checklist by project managers to assess how well the project is doing in terms of managing for impact.
Table 2-1. Example of projects that do and that do not manage for impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Project That Manages for Impact</th>
<th>Project That Does Not Manage for Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A focus on poverty</td>
<td>The implementing partners, including primary stakeholders, collect data on impact and meet regularly to consider if impacts can be seen and whether they meet expectations.</td>
<td>The project leaves impact assessment to outside organisations and only focuses on monitoring the implementation of activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A learning environment</td>
<td>Project and partner staff and primary stakeholders regularly and openly discuss progress and problems. Problems and mistakes are the basis for learning how to work better. People feel safe enough to share their ideas and observations with higher authorities and peers.</td>
<td>Staff focus only on implementing activities, without asking if they are relevant to local poverty needs. Project/Partner organisation staff feel that their ideas and observations are not valued and do not speak up when they see things going wrong. Primary stakeholders are rarely asked their opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective operations</td>
<td>Clear systems exist for tracking staff performance, equipment use, etc. People are clear about their responsibilities and deadlines, and the resources they need to do their work are available. The managers allocate sufficient budget and are building capacity where needed.</td>
<td>People are often unclear about what they should be doing, when and where. Vehicles and other resources are poorly coordinated and often not available on time. Much time is wasted in inactivity. No efforts are made to fill capacity gaps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A supportive M&amp;E system</td>
<td>The project manager has quick and easy access to information about project progress. Staff and partners generate information about outcomes and impact achievements. Information about project progress is shared regularly with all stakeholders in a visually appropriate way. The walls of the project office show up-to-date information, graphs, time charts and pictures about project progress. Studies are undertaken to explain any emerging problems. Project reports make interesting reading, and tell both the good and bad and how improvements will be made.</td>
<td>Few people know what the project has achieved to date. There is little evidence about whether all the activities of the project are leading anywhere. M&amp;E is seen largely as an external reporting function. Project reports are uninteresting, are not analytical, and exaggerate successes while not mentioning problems. Little information is shared with project stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.2 Guiding the Strategy for Poverty Impact

A typical IFAD-supported project has about seven years during which to have an impact on poverty. At start-up, the project strategy is first revised. This is a critical opportunity for strategic guidance. After this, the project’s energy tends to focus on putting capacities and procedures in place; while towards the end, efforts often focus on consolidating impact and phasing out the project presence. This leaves the project stakeholders with three or four years of prime time to take corrective action.

To know how best to mobilise project resources and partnerships for reducing poverty, the implementers need to understand the project strategy and redirect it when problems arise. Guiding the strategy is largely about asking the right questions – and getting answers – at the right moments (see Box 2-2). M&E processes are critical for making collaborative decisions about adjusting the project’s direction.

Box 2-2. Five strategic M&E questions to manage for impact

- **Relevance** - Is what we are doing now a good idea in terms of improving the situation at hand? Is it dealing with the priorities of the target groups? Why or why not?
- **Effectiveness** - Have the plans (purposes, outputs and activities) been achieved? Is the intervention logic correct? Why or why not? Is what we are doing now the best way to maximise impact?
- **Efficiency** - Are resources used in the best possible way? Why or why not? What could we do differently to improve implementation, thereby maximising impact, at an acceptable and sustainable cost?
- **Impact** - To what extent has the project contributed towards poverty reduction (or other long-term goals)? Why or why not? What unanticipated positive or negative consequences did the project have? Why did they arise?
- **Sustainability** - Will there be continued positive impacts as a result of the project after the project funds run out in four or five years? Why or why not?
Every project has an overall logic (see Figure 2-2 and Box 2-3) that describes what is to be achieved, why and how. The project logic starts by describing the situation that a group of stakeholders wishes to improve. The vision about how this situation can be changed should be based on the problems and aspirations of stakeholders, and particularly of the rural poor. This vision justifies the project’s existence. Inevitably there will be different perceptions of the key problems and what constitutes an improvement. This is why participatory approaches to planning are so important (see Sections 2.7 and 3.2 for more details on participatory planning).

Figure 2-2. The Project strategy and its local context

Box 2-3. From activities - via outcomes - to impacts

**Impacts** are changes in the lives of the rural poor or, more specifically, improvements in their wellbeing. To reduce poverty, a project team plans concrete **activities**. But these do not lead directly to impacts. There are many steps en route and many other players involved who influence final impact, so activities need continual steering.

Most planning approaches put two steps between activities and impacts: outputs and outcomes. **Outputs** are the direct products or services delivered by the project. The **outcomes** are what happen after outputs are delivered. They are the first signs of impact. Outcomes usually involve behaviour change in people or organisations as a result of the project. For IFAD-supported projects, impacts are both the outcomes and what happens with the rural poor after the outcomes have taken place.

For example, a project output might be “research into and development of an improved farming system” in the project area. The outcome for this is “adoption of the improved farming system by intended primary stakeholders”. Then the impact will be that this adoption has improved the financial and food security situation of those who have made the change.
After making sure you have a clear “objective hierarchy” and the project is underway, guiding the project strategy for poverty impact becomes a matter of steering – continually checking, questioning and correcting. Proof that you have been guiding the project strategy well is when, from year to year, all stakeholders can see an improvement in how activities are implemented, in relationships between stakeholders and in the quality of project outputs.

Focusing only on poverty reduction is a long-term goal. So it is not very useful for everyday guidance. Reflections on the project’s direction in, for example, monthly or quarterly meetings will focus on activities, outputs and processes, but will also require adjusting assumptions that underpin the project. Each year, a close look at the overall poverty reduction goal is needed to manage for impact. This is when impact monitoring plays a central role.

### 2.1.3 Encouraging Learning through Critical Reflection and Participation

It is the people involved in a development intervention who will make it succeed or fail. Their participation in learning how to improve a project throughout its existence is fundamental. For project and partner staff, this means listening carefully and regularly to the views of different groups – including each other – about what is working and what is not, and hearing reasons for why problems exist and what needs to improve. Learning certainly requires more than only “listening”. Opportunities need to be created for staff from the project and implementing partners and primary stakeholders to meet and analyse their experiences with the project. Section 8 offers ideas to encourage reflection and critical analysis.

A good M&E system provides and communicates data to help stakeholder groups analyse progress. M&E is nothing more – or less – than an open and critically reflective communication process to strengthen project partnership. Putting participatory learning at the centre of good project management requires both data on project activities and personal accounts of people’s experiences. It requires regular reviews by project staff with primary stakeholders, supported by occasional inputs from outside specialists.

In many development interventions, people lose motivation if they are either not invited to participate or the conditions are not created for their meaningful participation. Participation in M&E is meant to provide opportunities for people with relevant views about the project to learn how to improve it.

Behind this simple statement lie two questions. First, who has a relevant view? As it is neither practicable nor necessary to include everyone in developing the M&E system, choices need to be made. Second, how can different people best be involved? Different stakeholders’ involvement in key M&E tasks needs to be negotiated. Do they want to participate, and under what conditions, in:

- designing the M&E system (questions to answer, indicators for data collection, choice of methods and frequency, etc);
- data gathering and synthesis;
- analysis for decisions to improve actions;
- communication and feedback of results?

A participatory learning approach to M&E needs to be supported by a participatory style of management. If you are going to involve many stakeholders successfully in M&E, then they need to feel that the managers encourage and reward critical reflection. Only then will everyone be able to learn from problems in order to make the project work better. If manage-
ment has a primarily controlling and punishing function, then those involved will not want to risk innovation. This will greatly limit a project’s ability to manage for impact.

### 2.1.4 Ensuring Effective Operations

Ensuring effective operations requires putting in place the practical and operational conditions for carrying out project activities efficiently. Operations are guided by the annual work plan and budget (AWPB) and by regular meetings with implementers and primary stakeholders.

A project needs detailed annual and half-yearly work plans and budgets for six areas:

1. **Staffing**: numbers, salaries, capacities, quality of performance;
2. **Equipment, goods, office buildings**: amounts and qualities of which materials per location, plus processes in place and resources allocated for maintenance;
3. **Managing contracts**: tracking and guiding the quality of subcontracted parts of implementation, including contracts with communities about their rights and responsibilities;
4. **Finances**: tracking expenditure in order to (re-)allocate resources as necessary, as well as producing financial audits required by law;
5. **Work planning**: producing and monitoring the monthly, half-yearly and annual work plans for individual staff members, implementing teams and the project as a whole;
6. **Communications**: production and dissemination schedule and responsibilities for all communiqués, presentations and publications for shared decision-making and accountability.

### 2.1.5 Steps in Developing the M&E System

Figure 2-1 has shown that managing for impact is based on the M&E system. Developing an M&E system involves six steps (see Section 2.5):

1. establishing the purpose and scope;
2. identifying performance questions, information needs and indicators;
3. planning for information gathering and organising;
4. planning critical reflection processes and events;
5. planning for quality communication and reporting;
6. planning for the necessary conditions and capacities.

Each of these design steps needs to be dealt with twice. First, as part of the appraisal report, in which the design team describes a general M&E framework for each of these six elements. Second, during project start-up, the project staff need to transform the general M&E framework into a detailed operational M&E plan. The six steps are discussed in detail in Sections 4 to 8.

The outputs of the project M&E system will provide answers to the five questions that guide the project strategy. Looking at the questions in Box 2-2, operational management is more frequent and must focus on the questions of “effectiveness” and “efficiency”. More strategic reflections, for example during annual reviews and supervision missions, will look at the questions of “relevance”, “impact” and “sustainability”.

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2-8
2.2 Management and M&E

2.2.1 Key Opportunities to Manage for Impact

The four elements of managing for impact are the broad processes that need to happen in any project. But on a daily basis, project and partner staff and primary stakeholders carry out more specific management functions, each of which presents an opportunity to refocus on impacts.

- **Leading** - Providing vision, strategic direction and inspiration
- **Planning** - Setting and adjusting goals and objectives, and then deciding when to achieve them and what needs to be done, how and by whom, including resource allocation
- **Organising (internal and external)** - Setting up the internal structures and processes for the project to operate, plus dealing with the political system in which the project is set and coordinating stakeholders’ roles
- **Staffing** - Employing, supervising, training and motivating those involved
- **Checking** - Ensuring that planned actions have been carried out and resources have been allocated and used appropriately

The idea of managing for impact can be implemented quite simply in regular events, such as annual project reviews, quarterly and mid-year partner/staff meetings, and during supervision missions. These ideas are easy for existing projects to implement as part of their current processes and for new projects to plan into their operating procedures.

For example, projects increasingly hold annual reviews with primary stakeholders as part of their ongoing self-evaluation process. During such a review, staff, partners and local people will discuss the monitoring data on activities, outputs and outcomes. They will analyse them with respect to project goals to see how activities are - or are not - contributing to poverty reduction. They will also discuss the quality of the project implementation process and of relationships amongst stakeholders. This leads to formulating the next annual work plan and budget (AWPB) and adjusting M&E plans. This self-assessment and development of the AWPB form the basis of the annual progress report, but more strategic issues can also emerge from community-level discussions (see Box 2-4). So an annual review process links all four elements of managing for impact: impact, strategy, operations and M&E.

### Box 2-4. Changing strategic direction in the Northwest Agricultural Services Project, Armenia

In the initial project design, a community development component was included with the intention of funding community activities and infrastructure. However, once the project began and discussions were held with communities, the project team realised that a more sustainable approach to the project would be to use this funding to stimulate small-scale community enterprise development. If these enterprises turned out to be successful, then the community would be able to afford to invest in their own infrastructure needs, such as water supply and schools. The project team felt that this approach of building greater economic self-reliance would have a more lasting impact. With the agreement of the primary stakeholders, project staff, government and IFAD, the project strategy was changed to make this possible. Now the project needs to check that their assumption that people will invest in their own infrastructure needs is, indeed, a correct one. If this is not happening, then they might need to rethink the project strategy again.

Quarterly and mid-year review and planning meetings could operate similarly to a participatory annual review, perhaps with fewer stakeholders and more discussion on the quality of implementation and relationships. Using monitoring data in discussions can challenge people’s impressions and the assumptions and so trigger analysis of what is really happening. Quarterly and mid-year reports could then focus on the achievement of activities, analysis of key achievements and problems, and - most importantly - on agreeing how to improve imple-
mentation. Such regular and improvement-oriented self-assessments are proof of a healthy learning environment that focuses on achieving impact by organising and implementing operations effectively.

Supervision missions and mid-term reviews are also occasions when all four aspects of managing for impact come together. But a project cannot rely on these alone, as MTRs come too late in a project’s life (see Box 2-5) and supervision missions are not always in enough depth or timed appropriately to influence impact achievement. When project implementers take responsibility for their own learning process, they can then take corrective action when it is needed and not when it is too late. Such action involves redressing mistakes, expanding good practices, responding to changes in the context by rethinking activities and processes, and taking up new opportunities.

Box 2-5. Managing for impact - don’t wait for the mid-term review!

Many IFAD-supported projects only start paying attention to M&E at the mid-term review stage. Such a late start with M&E is obviously not desirable. For example, according to the 1997 supervision mission report of one project, monitoring at the government level was not very effective, with the qualitative impacts not being monitored. According to the loan agreement, the government should have established institutional arrangements to monitor and evaluate progress with project impact on primary stakeholders. However, although the project was initiated in 1995, these arrangements were only established by September 1997. Until that time, there was an apparent absence of a proper M&E system in the supervision reports and the memoranda on the project. The only source of impact evaluation was the mid-term status review undertaken by a local research centre.

2.2.2 Knowing Your Information Needs and Planning Learning Opportunities

Clarity about your information needs helps in structuring the M&E system and, in particular, knowing how to make the most of events such as half-yearly revisions, MTRs and annual participatory reviews. To check if your M&E system is providing the information you need, refer to the five questions in Box 2-2. If part of the picture is missing for you, then you need to adjust existing M&E processes.

Not only managers have information needs. Everyone involved in the project has specific tasks in the project and therefore specific information needs. A project M&E system must consider as many needs as possible. Only then will managing for impact become a participatory learning process. Section 5 discusses some ways to deal with different information needs. For this reason, all projects must have a range of learning events. For instance, the Tropisec project in Nicaragua seeks inputs from 16 different events and information sources (see Section 2.7.2).

To use information most effectively for managing for impact, think about the key moments during the project life when strategic decisions are made that enable you to move closer to a poverty reduction impact (see Figure 2-3). Information from M&E will be most useful if it feeds into these moments.

Thinking about these key moments as learning opportunities to manage for impact can reveal their value as strategic steering exercises, rather than as obligatory. Keep the level of discussion and type of decision appropriate to the event. For example, an annual review process is usually not the best moment to discuss how to organise the delivery of stationery supplies to village groups. Nor is a weekly staff meeting the appropriate place to agree on the new terms of contracts with partners.
2.2.3 Recognising and Tracking Operating Constraints in the Project Context

Understanding context is critical when it comes to assessing relevance of strategy and activities, anticipating operational problems and judging a project’s contribution, and also when designing the M&E aspects of a project.

You can start to disentangle the project’s contribution by analysing the evolution of project interventions alongside other concurrent external influences that affect primary stakeholders. Continual updating on context also allows you to adapt the project strategy and operations while en route. A systematic and regular assessment of operating conditions helps with anticipating some of the operational issues that could arise. For example, in Nepal, one project manager receives quarterly “political situation monitoring” reports to understand how the project may be affected. These reports include a brief description of that period’s critical events – such as safety and insecurity, government actions, demonstrations and dialogues – and their implications. The information is collected via key informants, newspapers, radio and television. It is essential for deciding whether or not to suspend activities in an insecure area.

Because contexts vary across projects and during the lifetime of a project, constraints and coping strategies will also vary (see Box 2-6). It is important to adjust project strategy and implementation to the extent that circumstances allow. The first element of managing for impact – guiding the project strategy (see Section 2.3) – may be particularly helpful for dealing with changing contexts. Section 3, on adapting the initial project design, also provides useful ideas.
Box 2-6. Enabling and constraining contexts

- Guatemala: At project start-up, political and socio-economic changes had led to a resizing of the state and to decentralisation of its functions. The project responded with a new strategy. It involved local actors (especially grassroots organisations) in a continual process of planning and evaluation, which facilitated the gradual decentralisation of project services. So an operating “constraint” was turned into an advantage and led to more participatory forms of monitoring and self-evaluation.

- Ghana: In 1996, clients complained that they would only rarely see the intermediaries - the banks that provide credit. After this complaint, the project created a “cycle of training” so that there would be constant follow-up and counselling. This created a new challenge - ensuring sufficient staff at the banks. Although they stipulated three staff members per bank to follow up with the clients, in practice there was often only one because of the government’s no-hire policy.

Those involved in designing a project also need to understand contextual issues. Design teams may unknowingly specify certain modes of operations and organisational relationships that cause significant problems for negotiating and implementing good M&E (see Section 4 for more details on designing M&E). Tables 2-2 to 2-4 list project and context features that affect project management and M&E. As a project manager or the person responsible for M&E, you might wish to keep these in mind when deciding what direction to take in developing an M&E system.

### Table 2-2. Project features with methodological implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How many implementing partners are anticipated?</td>
<td>The more there are, the more time is needed to build capacity and negotiate for an M&amp;E system that meets all information needs and is genuinely shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ What aspects of the local culture and government system may help or constrain participatory processes?</td>
<td>The existing local and organisational cultures may help or hinder more participatory M&amp;E efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Who is the cooperating institution – and what does it say about or require from M&amp;E?</td>
<td>Make sure that its and IFAD’s understanding of M&amp;E procedures and requirements do not contradict each other. Ask both to clarify what they want/need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How long is the timeframe for the project?</td>
<td>The longer, the more time you have for developing effective M&amp;E with all stakeholders but also the greater the pressure to produce far-reaching impacts and the greater the need to adjust the project en route in reaction to changing contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How much of the project design is fixed?</td>
<td>Knowing the boundaries for adapting the project enables you to focus your critical-reflections effort on those areas where strategic change is possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Have learning opportunities been designed into the project?</td>
<td>The less this is the case, the more effort is needed to put in place incentives to use M&amp;E as a genuine learning tool to adjust the project strategy and operations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2-3. Project features with communication implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How large and decentralised are project operations?</td>
<td>The larger and more decentralised, the more decentralised analysis of M&amp;E data can be and also the more attention needs to be paid to setting up communications flows so that the managers stay informed of what is happening locally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How decentralised is the government in the project area?</td>
<td>If more decentralised, then theoretically there is more potential for stakeholder involvement in project M&amp;E, with more options for downward accountability as a form of beneficiary-oriented transparency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How hierarchical is the governance tradition in the project country/area?</td>
<td>The form of governance may require or prohibit the involvement of various levels of bureaucracy in M&amp;E and may bring with it more or less bureaucracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How receptive are the local cultures to sharing problems and learning from mistakes?</td>
<td>Cultural-historical contexts will determine the extent to which certain types of information can be criticised and to which people learn from error and share problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ How many funding agencies and partners does project management have to report to – and what do they need?</td>
<td>The greater the diversity and number of funding agencies and implementing partners, the more care is needed to keep different reporting/accountability demands manageable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2-4. Project features with implications for the quality of information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the project in an area of civil unrest?</td>
<td>In areas of conflict, the “start-stop” nature of projects will compromise continuity of implementation and thus of progress assessment, besides making the attribution of impact more difficult due to the large impact of external factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of operational style does the project have?</td>
<td>Different types of projects (more or less decentralized or open-ended) will need to consider different types of indicators to assess the quality of the processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How decentralised and “good-governance” driven is the government in the project area?</td>
<td>The less transparency in a government sector, the more difficult it is to unearth and use highly critical data that emerge from the M&amp;E system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of development goals does the project strive to achieve?</td>
<td>Depending on the project focus, the impact on poverty alleviation will be more or less direct and will therefore affect how to undertake impact assessment and demonstrate attribution clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the project focus on physical changes or on human capacities - or both?</td>
<td>More quantitative and physical change-oriented project goals versus capacity development and empowerment-focused goals will make other demands on assessing long-term impact in terms of improved lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How expansive is the project?</td>
<td>The larger the geographic coverage of the project, the more conscious effort needs to be made to understand local people’s views and to assess above the activity level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Guiding the Project Strategy for Poverty Impact

2.3.1 About the Project Strategy

Let’s turn now to the first of the four elements of managing for impact in more detail – the project strategy and how to guide it.

The main output of the formulation phase is a draft strategy for the project. The strategy consists of an objective hierarchy and a description of the necessary implementation arrangements and resources needed. The strategy is the basis for the project appraisal report. For IFAD-supported projects, the project strategy is based on the logical framework approach (LFA) and project objectives are summarised as a hierarchy in a logframe matrix (see Section 3). But irrespective of how the project strategy and objectives are formulated, the ideas in this section remain relevant.

By necessity, any project strategy simplifies reality. It cannot possibly describe all details of a context and of the intended plan. This means that the documented strategy is a management tool that requires continual adjusting to reflect current contexts and changing needs.

It is fundamental that the project strategy be made as clear as possible at the onset for – and with – all those involved. In one IFAD-supported project, the staff did not have a clear understanding of what the project was about. The initial project design was poorly formulated and had been based on very limited stakeholder consultation. Since the document was so unclear, people were not motivated to investigate and respond to the problems they encountered. Staff were passively implementing whatever the document said, so were driven by activities rather than impact.

2.3.2 The Objective Hierarchy and Assumptions

The objective hierarchy is the spine of the project strategy (see Figure 2-4 and Box 2-7). The hierarchy describes how lower-level activities contribute to higher-level objectives, and how these, in turn, help achieve the overall project purpose(s) and goal.

Figure 2-4 shows an objective hierarchy with four levels and assumptions between all levels. Development organisations use many different names for the levels in the objective hierarchy.
and even different numbers of levels (see Section 3). But all levels can be considered objectives, as they are something that the project stakeholders want to achieve. This is why the term, objective hierarchy, is used (although the terms, intervention logic and narrative summary, are also used). The hierarchy is the first column of the logframe matrix and shows how the “means” lead to the “ends” of an intervention.

Figure 2-4. A project’s objective hierarchy

Box 2-7. Definitions for four levels of an objective hierarchy

- **Goal**: The long-term objective, change of state or improved situation to which a development intervention, such as a project or project component, is intended to contribute. For IFAD-supported projects, the goal is some form of poverty reduction. The extent to which the project contributes towards the goal is the impact of the project.
- **Purpose**: The overall objective of the project (or project component), in terms of overall observable changes in performance, behaviour or status of resources that the project (or project component) is responsible for achieving. Standard logframes use one project purpose while IFAD recognises that a complex project may have several purposes.
- **Outputs**: The products, services or results that must be delivered by the project implementers for the project purpose(s) or project component purposes to be achieved.
- **Activities**: The actions taken by project implementers, which are required to deliver the outputs by using inputs such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources.

Getting the logic of the hierarchy clear with the implementing partners, including primary stakeholders, is essential – although this does not necessarily mean using the logframe terminology with them. Simply ensure that there is consensus about what is to be implemented in the short-, mid- and long-term and for what overall purpose and goal. If a hierarchy is not logical, then you may end up implementing many different fragmented activities that do not lead to a clear output. Poor logic can most certainly lead to project failure (see Box 2-8). Or you may be promising to deliver an impact for the rural poor that is totally impossible given your timeframe and budget. Finally, if you are not clear about what you intend to achieve by when, then you will find it very difficult to know precisely what you should be monitoring and evaluating.

Box 2-8. How project logic of the strategy affects project success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Successful Project</th>
<th>Good theoretical [logical] model + Good implementation = Leads to project success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Failure of a Project</td>
<td>Incorrect theoretical [logical] model + Good implementation = Leads to project failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure in implementation</td>
<td>Good theoretical [logical] model + Failure in implementation = Leads to project failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute failure</td>
<td>Incorrect/ illogical theoretical model + Failure in implementation = Leads to project failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Margoluis and Salafsky (1998) - see Further Reading.
Figure 2-4 also shows that a project strategy contains many assumptions. An assumption is any condition outside the direct control of the project that is important for the project to succeed. There are two types of assumptions: external factors and those relating to the internal cause-effect logic (see Box 2-9). You will need to make more assumptions as you move higher up the objective hierarchy, as the project is only one of often many stakeholders contributing to rural poverty reduction and so there are increasing issues outside the direct control of the project.

Assumptions need to be identified in initial project design but this is often poorly done. The assumptions are an important tool for guiding the project strategy. Identifying them helps you know if the project strategy has a reasonable chance of success or is based on unlikely assumptions. Checking them regularly to see which ones are risky for the project, updating them based on better understanding from experiences, and identifying new ones is critical for guiding the project strategy. See Section 3 for ideas on how to work with assumptions as part of your M&E system.

**Box 2-9. Working with assumptions**

In Nepal, the WURAP programme has the following assumptions related to one of its desired outputs, “implementing a micro-finance programme, which includes training, and credit and savings”:

- market trends and fluctuations do not adversely affect the economic viability of on- and off-farm activities;
- project staff are properly trained and motivated;
- target groups are willing and able to participate effectively.

Most project designs include assumptions, such as these, that describe external factors needed for a project to succeed. For example, improving irrigation might be based on an assumption of continued water supply from a dam. But the dam could silt up due to poor environmental management or the government could decide to divert the water to other users for political reasons. By identifying those assumptions, project implementers can accept which ones are outside their direct control or see what they can do to reduce external risks.

But equally important – and more neglected – are assumptions about the internal cause-effect logic of the project. For example, an IFAD-supported project in Mali invests in building covered markets in isolated zones as a strategy for poverty reduction. This means that it assumes that the physical presence of these markets will increase household incomes. But who has access to these markets, will these markets be used, and is there produce to exchange in these markets? Will incomes actually increase for those who use the markets to trade? If there is increased household income, who controls how it is spent? And would it be spent on essentials? These are examples of internal logic assumptions that lie behind the simple statement of “marketplaces will reduce poverty in isolated areas”.

Making assumptions explicit helps you to check where the objective hierarchy has weak spots and so tells you what to adjust. It is also an important focus for analysing your monitoring data. For example, in an agroforestry initiative in southeast Brazil, the participating farmers were monitoring their investment in on-farm experiments. They were shocked to see how much time they were still spending after several years and how little productivity had increased. This forced everyone to reject the original assumption that poor farmers would get sufficient returns on their labour after two years. The project component on agroforestry was revised with an improved assumption about a slower rate of return for farmers and thus with more realistic levels of anticipated impact.

### 2.3.3 Accountability and Adjusting the Project Strategy

Knowing how to adjust the project strategy requires knowing how flexible you can be. There are two ways in which projects are adapted.

1. If projects are designed as open-ended strategies, with general directions indicated but with freedom for project partners to define the details of operations and activities... you will refine the project strategy as you proceed with implementation. The more flexible the design, the more you will need a good M&E system to provide information that can help.

2. If the project has been rigidly designed... M&E findings may lead the implementing partners to conclude that certain activities, processes or relationships are no longer relevant or that others are missing. You adjust the project strategy based on a better understanding of what is needed to reduce poverty in your area.
Knowing how to adjust the project strategy requires clarity about what project management is accountable for achieving. You should adjust whatever is necessary to be convinced that you can deliver what you are accountable for – and no more or less.

A project’s control over factors in the project environment that influence the achievement of objectives decreases with each level of the objective hierarchy (see Figure 2-5). At the level of “activities”, project implementers have much control. External factors are unlikely to threaten the implementation of activities seriously. But at the level of the “goal”, many factors beyond the direct control of implementers will influence impact. At this level, the project is one of many stakeholders contributing to the reduction of rural poverty. So a project’s accountability at higher levels also decreases but never disappears entirely.

For example, a project might include training activities for farmers. The project can directly control the hiring of a training venue, the preparation of materials, the provision of a qualified trainer and the invitation of suitable participants. It has less control over whether potential participants will attend and considerably less control, if any, over whether the skills the participants learn will actually be used back in the workplace. While the training unit of a project can be held accountable for making the training relevant and accessible, it cannot be held accountable for whether the farmers have all the necessary conditions on-farm to implement the new skills they have learned.

Therefore, if you are concerned that the project purpose can only be achieved if certain adaptations are made – and you know that you are accountable for delivering the purpose-level outcomes – then you will need to revise the strategy accordingly (see Box 2-10). You may need to negotiate with funding agencies and supervising organisations for approval of suggested changes. The limits of accountability may need to be negotiated with funding agencies – critical if you are to keep the expectations of impact realistic.

Box 2-10. Revising a project strategy

An M&E study in Challa village, China, on the welfare impact of an IFAD-supported credit project highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to poverty reduction. Although credit had helped to increase farm-level productivity because of higher adoption of technological packages, this did not automatically lead to increased income and welfare. The study showed that other factors such as post-harvest losses, marketing and agro-processing hamper incomes. Some factors, such as off-farm income-generating activities, had been incorrectly omitted from the initial project design. So the project strategy needed to change to consider farmers’ problems in a more integrated way. Local leaders, other primary stakeholders and experts were brought together so that farmers’ problems, needs and priorities could be identified in their complexity, thus improving the strategy.
2.3.4 Guiding the Strategy

To guide the project strategy, you have several management tools.

1. The idea of negotiation and shared decision-making with implementing partners and primary stakeholders may seem so obvious as to be ignored. Building agreement of the need for and types of changes is the basis of strategic guidance, as this increases the chance that changes will be carried out. Negotiations about change will also be needed vis-à-vis the funding agencies and the government structures in which the project works. Not all changes will be possible but with good M&E data to explain why changes are desirable, your manoeuvring space might increase.

2. The objective hierarchy is a valuable focus for regular (semi-annual and annual) review and planning events during which you compare achievements with targets and try to understand why differences occur – which they inevitably will. Many projects focus on activities during progress reviews, but this is not enough to manage for impact.

What a project aims to achieve is the purpose and goal level, while outputs and activities describe how it thinks it can do this. A progress review needs to look both at the “how” and the “what” question. Looking only at the activities and outputs, you could conclude these are all going as planned. But you also need to ask, “Where is this leading?” to know if you are on track with the planned outcomes and impacts. This will help avoid wasting time and resources on pointless outputs and activities.

3. Assumptions can be reviewed regularly to check if they are still valid. Identify new assumptions that have emerged and delete those that are no longer relevant.

4. Based on your assessment of problems, successes and revised assumptions, check each level of the hierarchy for relevance and completeness. Add new activities or outputs and delete irrelevant ones in line with your assessment. Adjust targets as necessary. This may require negotiation with funding agencies, particularly at higher levels.

5. An M&E system can provide data for and organise reflection processes around points 1 to 4 above.

Box 2-11 shows how one project in Venezuela is assessing achievement of project component outcomes and linking them to an improved strategy.

Box 2-11. Self-evaluation for strategic assessment in Venezuela

PRODECOP in Venezuela analyses project component results in five steps.

1. Anticipated outcomes (as planned): assessing for each objective on a scale of 0 (not available) to 5 (excellent) if the objectives were achieved.

2. Unanticipated outcomes: describing the outcomes and assessing whether they made a high, medium or low contribution to the project component.

3. Factors affecting the outcomes: listing the factors and assessing if they were positive or hindering and why.

4. Possible impacts realised: for four levels (primary stakeholders and communities, PRODECOP staff, PRODECOP, other programmes/organisations) listing the possible social, economic, educational and other impacts that might be occurring now.

5. Actions needed to improve success with component objectives: listing all actions that the project will take on itself and all actions that are the suggested responsibility of others (indicating whose responsibility they should be).

The M&E data for this analysis comes from surveys and key informants. The five steps are followed for the three project components: (1) capacity-building for development and civil participation, (2) the financial services and rural finance system, and (3) monitoring and evaluation.
2.4 Creating a Learning Environment

2.4.1 What is a Learning Environment?

The second element of managing for impact concerns the learning environment that needs to be created if people are to provide strategic and operational guidance by reflecting critically on what is happening.

How can you know if your project is actively learning? If you can clearly say “yes, this is happening here” to the following items, then you know that in terms of managing for impact your project is well on its way to having a culture of learning through critical reflection:

- Individuals feel that their ideas and suggestions are valued.
- Mistakes and failures are considered important by everyone for learning and not shameful.
- All the key groups involved in project implementation communicate openly and regularly.
- Project implementers, including primary stakeholders, regularly and informally discuss project progress, relationships and how to improve actions.
- Managers listen carefully to others and consciously seek solutions together.
- During regular meetings and workshops, time is set aside for discussing mistakes and learning lessons.
- The question, “Why is this happening?” appears often in discussions.

A learning environment can be created through many small changes as well as more far-reaching events and changes. One project in Tanzania integrates more than 20 different ways of working in order to stimulate learning – from the very way in which the project is designed to how fieldwork happens as well as annual reviews with villagers in the project area. Critical to this is the attitude of and example set by senior management and also a dialogue between implementing partners (see Box 2-12).

Box 2-12. Importance of feedback to develop a learning environment

The management team for the rural micro-enterprise development project PADEMER in Colombia is very committed to M&E. A success of management has been its ability to act on M&E-based information. Monitoring visits to the field have led to the cancellation of contracts with some implementing agencies, and changing the implementation processes and feedback has been used to encourage implementing partners to adapt their strategies. Four times a year, the partners submit financial and technical reports to the M&E unit, which analyses them and provides feedback. This feedback has been important for the partners to learn about what information is relevant for reporting. They are reporting results and processes, rather than simply listing activities and goal achievement.

2.4.2 How Management Styles Affect Learning

In one project in Latin America, the project manager asks colleagues to evaluate her performance. This type of management attitude is rare. Yet it sends a clear message of being open to feedback and prepared to learn from colleagues. Few managers are selected on their management skills and attitudes, but all can work on improving the needed skills. Staff in one project identified two essential qualities required by project managers to support monitoring and learning:

- Attitude – The person chosen for project manager must have a basic understanding that M&E is essential to the project and that M&E staff are colleagues, not competitors.
• Willingness – There must be a sense of commitment to learning and to creating a positive team spirit. This is demonstrated through staff-manager relationship building, open and transparent feedback and dialogue, and allocating sufficient resources for M&E.

While the wider cultural context will affect how a project creates its learning environment, the internal project culture lies within the influence of a project manager. When two projects in the same country were compared, one was designed better but managed the M&E system poorly, while the other had a poorly designed but well managed system and appeared to be doing better. Good management can deal with many problems, even those of poor design.

Encouraging learning does not have to be complex (see Box 2-13). In Ghana, the World Bank director has an “open door” policy. If project staff have a quick question, they can call and ask the question and frequently get verbal clearance and advice immediately. This streamlines project decision-making because team members do not have to try and frame the question in a letter, mail it, then wait for a reply. This has been particularly helpful in procurement and financial management. An even simpler idea comes from India, where the project director has a habit of extensive touring to the local development groups. This enables more qualitative monitoring and direct impressions. The project director provides a feedback letter to whomever he has visited. Section 8 gives more ideas on encouraging critical reflection.

**Box 2-13. Sharing ideas can avoid staff frustration**

Although exchanges between projects can greatly stimulate learning, IFAD-supported projects have tended to act as isolated islands of activity. An outward-looking style of management can avoid this. Two IFAD-supported projects in the same country share similar goals and many of the same management staff within the Department of Agriculture, including the same provincial project coordinator and the same provincial agricultural monitoring person. Each project has separate managers. Yet they rarely meet together or organise any kind of forum for consolidation of project experiences or simple coordination of activities. This has frustrated other project staff due to the ensuing lack of direction, prioritisation and linkages both in and between projects, leaving them to balance their own work schedules between the two projects and with their other non-project related work duties.

By contrast, one of the most important sources of inspiration for organising the M&E of operational aspects in a project in Benin came from contact with another nearby IFAD-supported project that had begun a year earlier. Most important was the production of an M&E manual specifically focusing on, for example, formats for recording M&E findings and making reports, as the first project had done. Documentation was borrowed from the first project, and the managers from both projects have visited each other and exchanged thoughts on M&E.

### 2.4.3 Valuing Problems to Avoid Failure

You may have had the experience of reading a report about a project that you know well and realised that what you are reading is a very different story than what you know to be true. It is likely that what has not worked well is not being reported.

Problems occur on a daily basis in any project. They are not the same as failure. In fact, mistakes can help in avoiding failure – but only if they are used for learning. It is common wisdom that we learn more from failure than success. So is it not strange that everyone tends to overemphasise, and even exaggerate, success while downplaying problems and failure?

All organisations and individuals generally want to portray themselves as being successful. The desire for good news is present at all levels of the system, from ministries and funding agencies, down to field reports. It stimulates the ongoing reporting of the “myth of success” (see Box 2-14), which means missing a key learning opportunity.
Box 2-14. Under-reporting non-success

In one project, indicators were developed for classifying cooperatives in terms of their performance. The cooperatives were classified but with superficial analysis. A key staff member involved in cooperative development keeps much detailed performance analysis in his head. Without this more extensive analysis shared and documented, he says that the analysis tool can often give the impression that a cooperative is more advanced than it is; for example, that the cooperative could operate independently even though, in reality, it probably could not. When pressed to explain why he does not include this detailed analysis in the cooperative reports, he explained that the managers and component heads want to show positive results. If he were to include his analysis, far fewer cooperatives would reach the classification of “satisfactory” and “very satisfactory”. Having too many cooperatives classified as “unsatisfactory” could threaten ongoing funding.

To create a learning environment, those in positions of authority can recognize the problem of underreporting problems and address it. Here are a few simple ideas to show that stimulating learning in a project environment does not need to be difficult. Section 8 discusses in more detail how to facilitate the kind of reflection that is needed for mistakes to become a positive force for change.

• In quarterly and annual reports, document what went well and what did not go so well. Also write what the project and partners are now going to do differently as a result of analysing the causes of mistakes.

• You can value innovation by holding an annual competition, for example, “the most pioneering team member or fieldworker”. This type of public acknowledgement of those who think creatively and take risks can encourage others to take on more of a learning attitude.

• A simple innovation – a mobile complaint box that travels directly to the top – was introduced in the most notorious prison of India, Tihar Prisons. It has provided a direct link to decision-making by being circulated daily amongst prisoners and then handed to the prison director. A rural development project is not a prison and local stakeholders are not prisoners. But it is equally crucial for project management to get feedback regularly and openly if objectives are to be achieved. It is easy to implement the idea of anonymous “idea and complaint boxes” that are reviewed and acted upon by senior managers.

• Include well-selected representatives from the primary stakeholders in the project steering committee. This can help ensure that issues important to the rural poor are constantly on the agenda and that you have easier access to opinions that count.

2.5 Ensuring Effective Operations

You might have a great strategy and a very open team that is constantly seeking new challenges. But if you have not organized staffing well, equipment is a mess, and finances are not well kept, then a project cannot have a good annual work plan and budget and is more unlikely to have optimal impact. “Ensuring effective operations” involves putting in place the practical and operational conditions for carrying out project activities efficiently. Operations are guided by the annual work plan and budget (AWPB). The project strategy is the basis for the AWPB. How you carry out the AWPB determines whether or not you are ensuring effective operations.

The topic of ensuring effective operations is not the prime focus of this guide. It is only discussed briefly here in terms of what is needed and how it relates to M&E. See Section 3 for more ideas on the AWPB.
2.5.1 Key Operational Areas

To be operational, a project needs to provide detailed annual and half-yearly plans and reports detailing activities and budget use for six areas.

1. **Staffing.** This relates to organising the appropriate number of staff needed and their salaries and ensuring their capacities are relevant and are updated. Also critical are processes to assess staff performance. This may include the productivity of staff and partners but should focus more on the quality of their work.

2. **Equipment, goods, office buildings.** Items include: vehicles, construction equipment and office equipment (including computers and software). This means ensuring that you have enough appropriate operating space at headquarters and outlying project areas and that processes and resources are in place for their maintenance.

3. **Managing contracts.** All projects subcontract parts of the work – from minor parts to substantial components. For example, some IFAD-supported projects in Latin America work entirely through subcontracting, with many implications for M&E (see Section 1).

4. **Financial tracking and audits.** All projects are aware of the importance of tracking expenditure and are legally obliged to produce financial audits.

5. **Work planning.** Monthly, half-yearly and annual work plans are needed for each staff member and key implementing partner, for project components and for the project as a whole.

6. **Communications.** A schedule is needed that details the types of communication and responsibilities over the next planning period. This includes internal communiqués and publications for sharing information with other stakeholders including funding agencies.

2.5.2 Information Needs for Effective Operations

For each of these operational areas, M&E is needed to ensure that resources, processes and quality are adequate. A look at the information tracking systems of most projects will often reveal plenty of data on vehicles, supplies, finances, staffing and so forth. In some projects, tracking such inputs can take up much time of the M&E unit. In FODESA, a project in Mali, all implementation – and the monitoring of implementation – is subcontracted. The M&E unit spends a considerable percentage of its time keeping track of the compliance of an enormous number of contracts.

While much information needs to be gathered and analysed for operational management, this level of monitoring tends to be more straightforward than for the project strategy. Table 2-5 lists the key areas of operation management, the main management tasks and the information needs (also see Section 5).

It is tempting to want to know each detail about operations. But try to limit information to what you “need to know” and avoid what is “nice to know”. Also try to prevent all information from flowing up to senior management, as it will clog the decision-making process. Only ask for information to be shared if others really need to know it. Information that you “need to know” about operations should relate directly to the three basic questions for each operational area:

1. What has happened with the money used and the time that people have invested?
2. What is the overall performance of each of these areas – quality of output and quality of process?
3. Is it efficient enough or can we make improvements in how vehicles are used, staff performance, office supply procurement, etc?
Beneficiary contact monitoring can help gain insight into your operations. This requires regular contact with beneficiaries and asking their perceptions about project services and structures. From this you can determine how a project can better meet their needs and demands. You can gather data by maintaining records for each stakeholder in a project. But this is only feasible for clearly targeted stakeholders receiving a specific and measurable input, such as credit, and only for simple types of information. You can also establish a regular schedule of sample questionnaires and surveys. Questions can include: Do primary stakeholders know about services provided by the project? What proportion has used project services at least once? What problems do primary stakeholders feel are priorities to resolve? Finally, informal interviews can help you obtain more direct feedback from the field on success stories and problems. You will need to probe to find out not only what happens but also why. Annex D lists other methods you might find useful.

2.6 Setting Up and Using the M&E System

2.6.1 What is the M&E System?

Looking back at Figure 2-1, you can see that the four functions of managing for impact require an operational M&E system. The M&E system is the set of planning, information gathering and synthesis, reflection and reporting processes, along with the necessary supporting conditions and capacities required for the outputs of M&E to make a valuable contribution to decision-making and learning. Key project stakeholders need to develop the different elements of the system together if they are all to use the outputs to improve implementation.
Setting up an M&E system involves six steps that need to be dealt with twice - generally at initial design and in detail at start-up:

1. Establishing the purpose and scope - Why do we need M&E and how comprehensive should our M&E system be?

2. Identifying performance questions, information needs and indicators - What do we need to know to monitor and evaluate the project in order to manage it well?

3. Planning information gathering and organising - How will the required information be gathered and organised?

4. Planning critical reflection processes and events - How will we make sense of the information gathered and use it to make improvements?

5. Planning for quality communication and reporting - What, how and to whom do we want to communicate in terms of our project activities and processes?

6. Planning for the necessary conditions and capacities - What is needed to ensure that the M&E system actually works?

These steps can be used when initiating a new project or when revising and expanding the M&E system of an existing project. Existing projects might have planned for some of these M&E elements but miss or undervalue others, so M&E does not perform optimally. This might seem like a lot to remember but in practice is often quite clear. Box 2-15 outlines one project example from India that links several elements into an M&E system.

Box 2-15. Overview of a professional and efficient M&E system in India

The M&E system for the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project consisted of three elements:

1. Input/Output monitoring: regularly to assess the progress of the project and its performance and to respond to any problems that may occur during the project;

2. Impact monitoring and ongoing evaluation: to judge the effect of the project on its beneficiaries (information collected by the Village Development Councils (VDCs) and supplemented by M&E staff);

3. External evaluation and specific studies: to examine the long-term impact of the project and special issues arising during project implementation.

This M&E system succeeded because:

- The overall organisation was sound, with an extensive network of field offices including high-quality M&E staff, particularly at the state level.
- With the help of local experts, introductory M&E workshops were given to familiarise the implementing agencies with the monitoring requirements, followed by regular monthly meetings at the district level and periodic sharing workshops. These meetings have contributed to greater clarity and efficiency of the M&E system and the project impacts.
- There was regular and focused feedback: the M&E system had a very systematic way of providing feedback to the participating agencies after analysis of information from the field.
- In addition to the routine data-gathering, surveys at reasonable, valid intervals (as necessary) were carried out (for example, in-depth assessment of the status of the self-help groups).
- The data analysis was systematic, professional and included detailed information, for example, on specific poverty indicators.
- There was good involvement of primary stakeholders. A number of meetings were held at village level with relevant officials participating before the VDCs were formed, which could explain the adequate involvement of primary stakeholders in project processes.
2.6.2 From Data to Decisions

A critical attitude is needed to use data for decisions, as shown by this simple yet effective example (see also Box 2-16). The project officer of one IFAD-supported project in Bhadrachalam, India, reviewed the results of its school programmes and found them to be very poor in one zone. On closer examination, she found that the teachers in that zone were not adequately trained. An intensive training programme was introduced and the results showed a significant improvement. This person successfully used data and critical reflection to identify action.

Box 2-16. Small steps to use data for decisions

- In Benin, project staff documented problems in the M&E reports. For example, the reports mentioned that certain local groups did not have enough meetings or checks in place to function well. So the project was able to support the groups to change this situation.
- In India, an analysis of the monitoring information from a credit extension project revealed that the optimum size of a SHG (self-help group) for effective functioning is 15 women, so the project used this maximum number for all SHGs.
- In another Indian project, managers eliminated the difficult agricultural extension messages after noticing a pattern from periodic surveys that certain types of simpler training messages improved agricultural productivity levels.

Most project or partner staff associate monitoring with “data” or many tables of numbers. To monitor well, they feel it is important to spend time perfecting indicators. Thus, many projects end up with long lists of numeric data that staff feel they need to collect even though much of these data rarely influence the direction the project is taking.

Indicators and other information are critical for learning. But on their own they will not provide the understanding that project and partner staff need to guide the project strategy and operations. Getting agreement on data’s implications for action is essential to move from data to decisions. Any good M&E system will include clear plans and methods for analysis, communication and critical reflection with the relevant stakeholders. Sections 6 and 8 provide ideas for ongoing reflections and sharing of findings.

Documenting the decisions made after reflecting on M&E data can help to encourage their implementation (see Boxes 2-11 and 2-17). But documents also need to be used by managers to ensure follow-up. In one project, the M&E process clearly identified who was responsible for which changes. However, the reports were never used to check performance and so no one was ever held accountable on the basis of these reports.

Box 2-17. Format used as part of the results-oriented management design demanded by the Ugandan Ministry of Public Service (among others) to propose corrective action in periodic reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Issue</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Responsible person</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Evidence of Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.6.3 Balancing Internal Learning with External Accountability

The focus on M&E to support internal project learning and management does not mean ignoring wider upward and downward accountability. Projects have important responsibilities to primary stakeholders, government agencies, funding agencies and society at large to account for their expenditures, activities, outcomes and impacts. In turn, the supervising and funding agencies must account to their governments and taxpayers for the investments made. This does not have to be complex (see Box 2-18).

Box 2-18. Stories of change for accountability (Davies 1998, see Further Reading)

CCDB is a Bangladeshi NGO with approximately 550 staff. Its main programme involves more than 46,000 people in 785 villages in 10 districts. Participants have access to three types of assistance: group-based savings and credit facilities used to meet the needs of individual households, grant assistance given to the same groups on a pro-rata basis and intended for community-level developments, and skills training mainly for livelihood purposes. The large scale and open-ended nature of these activities posed a major problem for the design of any system intended to monitor processes and output.

In 1994 a participatory monitoring was tried that involved the deliberate abandonment of indicators. The new approach focused on "stories of change". Every three months, credit groups select and describe the single most significant change that has occurred in their groups in terms of at least three types of changes:
- changes in people's lives
- changes in people's participation
- changes in the sustainability of people's institutions and their activities.

These stories are documented simply to enable verification. To avoid having a huge number of stories filtered to the funding agencies, each layer in the project system (extension agent, their supervisors and central office staff) select those they found “most significant” and justify their choice. CCDB has kept up this approach for several years now because, according to the director, it suits their needs to account to donors as well as to understand impacts on participants.

Having "enough" M&E information means being able to say, with confidence, what is happening and why. It also means having enough information for the different information needs of project stakeholders on a “need to know” rather than “nice to know” basis.

A good project M&E system designed to meet the information needs for internal impact- and learning-oriented management will produce the information required for external accountability without much additional effort. The problem is that most projects work the other way round: first they try to do everything needed for reporting and then they invest little time in sorting out their own learning processes.

How do you know if you are investing enough in learning? When M&E is integrated into management, you cannot isolate M&E and track how much time each of the project implementers should be and are spending on learning. However, as a rule of thumb, budgets for M&E-related activities lie between about 2 - 5% of the overall project budget. This includes learning and accountability M&E processes and outputs.

2.6.4 Keep It Simple

A good M&E system is sophisticated in the information it generates, yet simple in its construction. It can be as basic as organising participatory AWPB review and planning sessions, alongside recording activities implemented and impact-tracking of very limited set of key indicators. One project in Bangladesh clustered its six core M&E activities as follows: stakeholder workshops to design project M&E, implementation monitoring of activities, financial monitoring, participatory impact monitoring to strengthen local village organisations, external M&E to assess overall impacts per group, and technical monitoring for specific research questions that might arise.
Another simple construction to consider involves viewing the core M&E system as consisting of three elements, to which other elements can be added as experience grows and needs change:

1. tracking inputs and outputs of operations and activities;
2. organising quarterly discussions with key stakeholders on progress and problems with implementation;
3. annual reflections on core impact questions (see Box 2.19) as the basis for the AWPB.

Note that these are just ideas – and not models to follow blindly.

**Box 2.19. Tracking impact with five key questions - the case of Oxfam**

Oxfam UK, a large international NGO, encourages the use of five questions to guide reflections

- What key changes have happened in people’s lives? How sustainable are they?
- What changes in equity and, in particular, gender equity are occurring at different levels?
- What has changed in the policies and practices, and ideas and beliefs, of those institutions that affect the lives of people living in poverty?
- What has changed in the degree to which people living in poverty have participated in and taken control over programmes, processes and decisions that affect their lives?
- How cost-effective have Oxfam and others been in promoting the above changes?

You can answer these questions with different degrees of precision, with the input of different stakeholders and by using a wide range of methods (see Annex D), so you still need to make decisions about how elaborate your M&E system will be. Nevertheless, working with core questions helps to structure the often overly ambitious plans for monitoring large datasets with which projects start (also see Section 5). Conditions for this to be valid – as with all M&E – are that some records be kept of answers, compared from time to time, shared and acted on.

**2.7 The Basics of Participatory M&E**

**2.7.1 Knowing what Participation in M&E Means**

For many project staff, participatory M&E is about “getting the community involved” - somehow, sometime, somewhere. For most projects, participation in M&E is another way of saying “let’s gather information from local people, using some questionnaires and diagramming methods”. In one project, for example, local people are only consulted when M&E staff are collecting data and only approached again when problems arise.

But there is more to participatory M&E than simply changing a few of your data-gathering methods. The NWFP project in Pakistan, funded by the World Bank, took on a more participatory monitoring effort in which communities controlled the quality of sub-projects (see Further Reading). Dropouts of community-based organisations fell from 37% in Phase 1 to none in Phase 3. Costs have been reduced by up to 40% and works are often of better quality than those carried out through government contracting. If participation is to lead to sustained efforts and empowerment, then a common understanding and shared decision-making are needed. This implies seeing joint M&E as part of good governance. An example of participatory M&E based on joint learning and shared decision-making is described in Box 2.20.
Box 2-20. District learning from Chella Village, Tanzania

Tanzanian district officials were asked a challenging question by a local project’s water users’ association (WUA) during an annual project review meeting: “You say that the project is ours and it is in our [association’s] action plan. Why don’t you tell us how much cement is needed, for example and what it costs? Why don’t you trust us with the cement so that we can keep it ourselves and supply it to the contractor as needed…so we can be responsible?”

The project coordinator was then asked for his consent – which he gave – to let the association supervise the use of the cement. So the association took over the responsibility of overseeing the distribution and use of the cement according to the bills of quantity and the requirements of the contractor. At the end of the rehabilitation process, the association managed to save seven bags of cement due to its “good supervision.” The association members pointed out that if the project staff had been supervising the entire contract, there probably would not have been a surplus. The association then proposed selling the excess cement and putting the money gained into the operation and maintenance fund. As a result of an annual review meeting discussion and further testing with a pilot group, the project has changed its contracting procedures to give more construction supervision responsibility to the WUA.

Participatory M&E is not just a matter of using participatory techniques for information gathering in a conventional monitoring and evaluation setting or of organising a single workshop to identify local indicators. It is about radically rethinking who undertakes and carries out the process and who learns or benefits from the findings. One way of thinking about levels of participation in M&E is suggested by Feuerstein (see Further Reading), an evaluation specialist:

- When you only listen to local opinions and then take the information away to analyse yourself, then you are only studying the specimens.
- When you are only sharing part of the analysed information with some of the stakeholders, then you are refusing to share results openly.
- When you have hired an external facilitator to guide a participatory evaluation, then you are locking up the expertise.
- When the project team sits down with staff from partner organisations and with the target group, then you can talk about partnership in development.

Let us apply some of this thinking to an increasingly common situation, the task of setting up a participatory process for the annual project review. You, as manager or M&E officer, need to make budget and staffing decisions about this important learning moment for the project. You have three options:

1. hire a consultant for a couple of months per year to facilitate key stakeholders for a short and focused input to get the job done;
2. hire a consultant for up to six months during the first two years of a project to design a process with project staff for this and facilitate parts of it, and so build staff capacity;
3. sit down with project partners and community members at start-up and develop a joint learning system together for all future annual project reviews.

Although this last option will take longer and require some compromises, you are investing in creating local capacities and ownership. Note that this does mean consciously planning capacity-building activities and realistic timing. Such participation can start as the project starts implementation but seeking wide stakeholder involvement earlier on is better (see Box 2-21).
Box 2-21. Stakeholder participation at project design helps M&E later on

- A manager involved in a biodiversity project in Ghana found that participatory decision-making in the design phase greatly improved the quality of subsequent M&E activities. During the design phase process, the team worked with communities to develop project implementation and impact indicators to be included in the project document. She said that by involving community members earlier in the process (in this case in the development of indicators), they understand the justification and strategy of the project better and are more active in implementing M&E.

- By contrast, at the start-up of a different project on income-generation, the responsible government departments held a workshop in order to detail the project logframe. Workshop participants (project managers and some potential NGO partners) looked at the operational aspects of the suggested impact indicators. All the project managers indicated their information needs and expectations and were asked to produce a multi-year operational plan. However, the final selection of NGO partners occurred at a later stage. Of those selected, only two had attended the initial workshop. The remaining 12 had not been involved in reviewing the M&E system. This caused problems later in terms of understanding what was needed for the project’s M&E.

An inspiring example of how M&E can be participatory, accountable and integrated with planning comes from Colombia (see Box 2-22). The example may seem outside your options, but parts of it may certainly be relevant to your situation. As a manager or M&E officer, you do not have to stop everything you have built up so far and start from zero. Start with a problem you are facing today and use the practical ideas in Sections 4 to 8 of this Guide, to slowly improve how you learn together.

Box 2-22. M&E that strengthens local governance in Colombia

In Colombia, ACIN, an association of indigenous people covering 13 communities, is monitoring and evaluating its own multi-sectoral regional development plan. This involves three cycles: (1) a three-year M&E evaluation cycle of the local development plan supported by (2) an annual evaluation cycle of the small projects that make up the plan and (3) a monthly monitoring cycle of project activities.

The three-year M&E cycle of the overall plan takes place during four assembly meetings. Each assembly is a community meeting of about 300 to 600 people, held over three days. Participants include men and women, adults and youth, children, leaders and government officials, and others who collectively take part in decision-making. Representatives from each social group and each of the six sectors of activities attend the four assemblies to ensure continuity.

- The community defines or revisits its vision of the future and establishes development criteria by comparing present and past situations. For example, the present situation is analysed by reproducing data from geographic information systems and small models of the local area. The first assembly is also used to revisit the existing local development plan, identifying the achievements, strengths and weaknesses of each sector based on the goals they had set out to achieve for the next three years.

- Expected results are identified by sector, based on the vision and development priorities defined in the first assembly. The expected results are prioritised and grouped into categories, and indicators are selected for each. After the second assembly, a workshop is held by the planning council who reviews the indicators formulated by the assembly and converts them into questions. These questions are then used to develop baseline surveys. The surveys are answered collectively in large-group meetings held in each community. The information is summarised in tables that show expected results, the corresponding indicators, monitored information and achievements attained.

- The surveyed information is presented at the third assembly. The indicators are compared against the targets set, and extra targets are identified for the next three years. Participants analyse the information in working committees per sector. The findings of the third assembly are discussed at the community level to ensure that the goals and findings are verified and receive broad-based support from the communities.

- In the fourth assembly, the local development plan, goals and activities are reviewed and adjusted based on the evaluation findings and analyses. The assembly, looking at what helped or hindered goal achievement, prioritises goals and identifies strategies to reach prioritised goals. Local development projects are formulated with the help of the council and sectoral community representatives. These projects are then presented to the assembly for approval.
2.7.2 Critical Decisions when Starting with Participatory M&E

You may be starting a new project and have an opportunity to make it participatory from the start. Or you might be planning to make the existing M&E system more participatory. In either situation, four decisions need to be made to develop a version of participatory M&E that suits your situation.

1. Be clear about different people’s motivations for getting involved in M&E and do not force them together if they do not fit. Simply provide support so the different systems work and support each other. Many people think that making M&E participatory means that everyone’s information needs can be met. But sometimes these information needs are so different that deciding on separate and complementary M&E systems is better than trying to squeeze everything out of one set of indicators or one set of discussions.

Table 2-6 shows one set of motivations from three stakeholder groups involved in an agricultural project in Brazil. After trying to work out one system for everyone, it was clear to the NGO that the information needs and unit of analyses were so different that different M&E processes were needed for each group.

In Nicaragua, the Tropisec project developed different M&E events and reporting mechanisms for different levels and stakeholder groups. For example, the family/grassroots level M&E centred on monthly meetings, biannual planning and evaluation sessions, and baseline surveys. Implementing agencies submit trimester results-oriented reports, lessons learned, local government focal meetings and independent evaluations of sub-contracted components. Finally, project management has similar M&E events to the implementing agencies and also organises, for example, monthly monitoring meetings and impact-evaluation case studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Why They Wanted to Monitor and Evaluate the Joint Agricultural Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>• to improve management of their own farming enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• to activate the interest of other farmers not yet involved in sustainable agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Rural Workers Union | • to evaluate impacts with more certainty and avoid unsubstantiated opinions |
|                     | • to prove to other farmers that sustainable agriculture practices can also benefit them and are worthy of support by organisations |
|                     | • to be able to evaluate better non-agricultural aspects of the union’s work |
|                     | • to help with planning, knowing what works and what does not |

| Local NGO | • to evaluate the local impact of innovations on ecological, social and economic well-being |
|           | • to report to funding agencies the extent to which efforts are meeting intended objectives |
|           | • to help plan and prioritise activities |
|           | • to have proof for advocacy purposes at the regional, state and perhaps national level |
|           | • to enhance the capacity of farmers and unions for autonomous planning and implementation of sustainable agriculture activities |
|           | • to strengthen interaction between recently formed farmer experimentation groups |
2. Negotiate and agree on “how much” participation for whom. Assessing how much participation for which groups depends largely on the purpose of participatory M&E.

If the purpose is setting up locally sustainable processes of monitoring and evaluating (for example, soil fertility), then local farmers and extension staff will need to be involved in the entire process: methodology design, information collection, information collation/calculation, analysis of findings, dissemination of findings. If the emphasis is internal project learning about local soil fertility management, participants can be limited initially to project staff but farmers’ assessments of local indicators will be essential. If it is about improving project accountability, then perhaps it is a case of conventional M&E, using participatory methods to find the information and analyse it with primary stakeholders.

Assessing the need for participation of the possible stakeholder groups (community members, farmer groups, community leaders, government agency or NGO staff, etc.) can be guided by asking the following questions.

- When is participation important: in methodology design, in the process of collating/calculating the information, in receiving the final analysis, etc?
- Who is going to use the final information about each activity, output, outcome and impact? Those who are to use it for decision-making should understand on what it is based and how it was calculated, otherwise they will not understand its implications.
- What skills does the analysis require? The more difficult the analysis might be, the more caution should be used in encouraging broad participation unless it is clear whom it will benefit and how.

3. Ensure that it is worthwhile for people to participate and decide what support is needed. Even if project and partner staff and primary stakeholders are motivated, they still need to see something come of their efforts if they are to keep investing time and energy into joint learning. Box 2-23 gives a few ideas on what is needed to sustain people's interest in M&E. Section 7 provides more ideas on incentives and motivation. Also, because capacities are often limited, you may well need to invest in building capacity. In Zambia, a project relied on district-level M&E. There were several problems: unclear roles, responsibilities and authorities, weak sub-district structures and limited M&E capacity. Concerted efforts will be needed to make participatory M&E possible in such a context.

Box 2-23. Factors influencing people's sustained participation in M&E

- perceived benefits (and partial or short-term costs) of M&E
- relevance of M&E to the priorities of participating groups
- flexibility of the M&E process to deal with diverse and changing information needs
- quick and relevant feedback of findings
- capacity to act on recommendations that might arise from findings
- capabilities, leadership, identity and degree of maturity of the groups involved, including their openness to sharing power
- local political history, as this influences society's openness to stakeholders' initiatives
- capacity to deal with short-term survival needs of participants, while pursuing longer-term information needs
- material support to make the M&E possible (e.g., pens, books, training, etc.)
4. Merge participatory M&E and non-participatory M&E in a project setting. Not all information needs are shared, so any project will be a mix of more and less participatory M&E (see Box 2-24). The operational areas will be monitored internally to the project, perhaps with partner organisations if this involves them. However, assessing the implementation process and impact will always require the opinions of primary stakeholders, and so will inevitably require a more participatory approach.

Box 2-24. Keeping difference in participatory monitoring

A workable participatory monitoring system should be based on a multi-level approach that links the different – and often competing – information needs of those involved in the project. Regular meetings are needed at each level to make use of the data generated. Some methods for participatory monitoring at different levels are:

- at village group level – group log-books, meetings, ledgers and accounts, plus community events;
- at extension agent level – diaries and log-books, and meetings to monitor group progress;
- at project level – project records and accounts, sample surveys, field visits, preparation of periodic progress reports and extension agent meetings to review their progress;
- at funding agency level – external monitoring and workshops.

Existing projects with the desire to move towards more participatory forms of M&E may feel that specific and complex skills and methods are needed. But it is simple changes that make the difference. In the Cuchumatanes project in Guatemala, project management only used internal evaluations initially to track progress, problems and solutions. However, after a change in project vision to transfer technical services to user groups, primary stakeholder representatives started to participate in these events. The primary stakeholders would present the services they were delivering or facilitating, and M&E staff would present results of the participatory self-evaluations of these stakeholders. These presentations were then used as inputs to formulate plans for the coming year. Each year, all groups helped to evaluate the M&E system together.

Introducing participatory practices in existing projects requires collective discussions to:

- describe and assess the basic functions and activities of the existing M&E systems of different stakeholders (including the formal project unit) in terms of what does and does not work;
- agree on what participatory M&E means and how this fits with the existing M&E systems;
- agree on how different stakeholder groups can be involved in collective learning and outlining a strategy for introducing more participatory forms of M&E into each project component (see Box 2-25).

Box 2-25. Contractual transparency and participatory M&E

An IFAD-supported project in Zimbabwe proposed that for any approved project, a contract be negotiated and signed publicly between the community, the district council and other partners. The contract would include how the community would monitor progress: the indicators and the modalities. Qualified facilitators with experience in participatory M&E would assist communities to organise this.
Further Reading


For more on North West Frontier Province Community Infrastructure Project, see: http://www.worldbank.org/participation/PMDC.htm

List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Section 3

Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
3.1 An Overview of Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E

3.1.1 Project Design as an Ongoing Process

3.1.2 Good Practices for Project Design

3.1.3 Using the Logical Framework Approach

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3.5 From a Logframe Matrix to an Annual Work Plan and Budget

3.5.1 What is the AWPB?

3.5.2 Preparing the AWPB

3.6 Outlining M&E During Initial Project Design

3.6.1 How Initial Project Design Influences M&E

3.6.2 Documenting M&E in the Project Appraisal Report

Further Reading

This Section is useful for:

- Managers – to understand the role of the logframe in project management and M&E and to know what to watch for when continually revising the project design;
- M&E Staff – to understand the role of the logframe in project management and M&E, and to ensure that during revision of project design, the M&E system and procedures are detailed enough for implementation;
- Consultants – to make a good initial design – in particular, ensuring that M&E is adequately considered – and to help revise the project design;
- IFAD and cooperating institution staff – to provide appropriate guidance to projects around issues of good project design, logframe and M&E design.

Key Messages

- Project (re-)design is an ongoing process over the life of the project.
- Not only project designers but also implementers need to understand good design principles so they can adapt the project strategy and operations in response to changing contexts and lessons learned from implementation.
- Good practices for project design (and adaptation) include: involving stakeholders, completing a detailed situation analysis, ensuring a logical intervention strategy, identifying cross-cutting objectives, planning for capacity development and sustainability, and planning for learning and adaptation.
- The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) can help in project design if the process steps are followed flexibly and its limitations are understood and addressed.
- The output of the LFA is the logframe matrix, which summarises the intervention logic (with assumptions) and M&E.
- The logframe matrix can be used to track progress with annual work plans and impacts. To fulfil this purpose, diligent use is a must and sufficient detail is needed.
- Developing a good M&E system depends on paying adequate attention to M&E during the initial design phase. The M&E system should be outlined in the project appraisal report.
3.1 An Overview of Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E

When you “manage for impact”, project design, annual planning and M&E become linked processes. Your starting point for implementation is the initial project design as outlined in the project appraisal report. But design is an ongoing process for the life of the project. Continually adapting the project strategy in response to new understanding and to changing contexts is key in maximising impact on rural poverty. So, good project design is as important for managers and M&E staff as for the initial design team.

Key aspects of a project’s design are built into the project loan agreement. Changing these can be difficult and time consuming. Thus it is critical that the initial design be as high quality as possible. In addition, the initial design team must build in flexibility to allow changes at project start-up when the design is revised. The PROCHALATE project in El Salvador learned the importance of rethinking the design the hard way. Staff there estimate that they could have prevented the loss of two years at the beginning if implementers had had better understanding.

3.1.1 Project Design as an Ongoing Process

Why is change to the project design necessary? First, many projects start up to several years after initial design, during which the context will have changed. The project cycle (see Section 1.4) includes the many steps that lead to start-up, each of which takes time. Second, the initial design of IFAD-supported projects is undertaken with limited time and resources. Many of the implementing partners will not have been identified and so there will have been limited participation in the process. This means that a comprehensive participatory process of reviewing and, where necessary, improving project design is critical at start-up.

After start-up, the two main opportunities for improving the project design are: (1) on an annual basis as part of the annual progress review and planning process and (2) during the mid-term review (MTR). Table 3-1 lists the design and adaptation tasks during the project’s lifetime, showing how (re-)design is ongoing.
There are six good practices in any design process of a development intervention. They are critical during formulation and start-up and when any revision of the project is undertaken, such as during annual and mid-term reviews.

1. Involve all relevant stakeholders in participatory processes of project design.

2. Undertake a thorough situation analysis, together with primary stakeholders, to learn as much as possible about the project context as a basis for designing a project strategy and implementation processes that are relevant.

3. Develop a logical and feasible project strategy that clearly expresses what will be achieved (goal and purposes) and how it will be achieved (outputs and activities).

4. Agree and focus on cross-cutting issues of poverty, gender and participation.

5. Plan for long-term capacity development and sustainability to ensure that the project contributes to the empowerment and self-reliance of local people and institutions.

6. Build in opportunities and activities that support learning and enable adaptation of the project strategy during implementation.
3.1.3 Using the Logical Framework Approach

Since 1998, IFAD has required that projects be designed using the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). This process was originally developed in the 1970s to improve the quality and clarity of project design. The LFA process is based on participation of key stakeholders, including primary stakeholders. The project design that results from the LFA process is summarised in a table that is referred to as the logical framework matrix, or logframe (see Section 3.3.2).

While the LFA has become widely accepted as useful for project planning, it also has some clearly recognised problems. So the standard LFA planning process has been improved in different ways over the years. Flexible and critical use of the LFA means:

- recognising that development is not mechanical by building options and opportunities for adaptation into the design;
- valuing outcomes (achievements between tangible outputs and long-term impacts) by making them explicit in the logframe;
- avoiding over-simplification of large projects or programmes by using multiple purposes, a cascading logframe or a five-layer logframe;
- including people’s visions and aspirations and identifying opportunities during the planning rather than focusing only on problem analysis;
- recognising that quantifiable indicators and qualitative information, such as opinions and stories of change, are needed for M&E;
- guarding against bureaucratic control by reporting more on outcomes, (interim) impacts and planned improvements – and less on activities and outputs;
- avoiding token use of the logframe matrix by ensuring it represents the shared vision for the development intervention, by using it as a management tool and by keeping it updated;
- tracking assumptions as part of M&E to help guide the project strategy.

Note that a project can be designed well in different ways - and that LFA is only one of these ways. Also, using the LFA is certainly no guarantee of ending up with a good project design. You need to be both critical and creative to ensure a design process that is appropriate for the context.

3.1.4 Linking Project Design with the Annual Work Plan and Budget

The project logframe will show the main activities for the life of the project. Each year the implementers need to identify which activities are needed for the coming year and prepare a budget. The logframe is the basis for the annual work plan and budget (AWPB). For the logframe to be useful, it must be sufficiently detailed and, in particular, updated to reflect the current situation of the project. For example, the original logframe may have included outputs or even components that are no longer appropriate and have been dropped.

How the project appraisal report is translated into operational plans varies enormously across projects, although all have annual plans. Some have an overall operational plan with milestones that look at key implementation over the project’s lifetime, which can help translate the logframe into annual clusters of activity. Others have “project implementation manuals” that detail operations. Some have two- or three-year operational plans, alongside annual plans.
3.1.5 Linking M&E to Project Design

Developing M&E starts long before start-up. Initial project design strongly influences the ease with which M&E is implemented later on through, for example:

• the relationships and commitment established with partners and local people, particularly the intended primary stakeholders;
• the logic and feasibility of the project strategy;
• the resources allocated to M&E (funding, time, expertise);
• the degree of inbuilt flexibility that allows M&E findings to have a steering function;
• any operational details of M&E that might be established during initial design.

During project formulation, a broad M&E framework should be developed and included in the formulation and appraisal documents. This framework provides: a) sufficient detail to enable budgeting and allocation of technical expertise, b) an overview of how M&E will be undertaken, and c) some guidance for project staff about how M&E should be set up during start-up. The M&E framework complements the highly summarised M&E information that is the logframe (see Section 3.4). Much of what is developed for the M&E system during the initial project design phase will only be indicative of the final plan and will need to be revised and refined during start-up.

3.2 Designing for Learning, Empowerment and Sustainability

Designing a good rural development project requires careful attention to the social processes and institutional development that will enable learning and the empowerment of primary stakeholders and lead to sustained benefits.

3.2.1 Involve Stakeholders in Project Design Processes

Projects without good stakeholder consultation are setting themselves up for failure. Those that do consult widely increase their chances of success. Box 3-1 describes a simple case in Ghana where a participatory process created the opportunity for primary stakeholders to adjust part of the strategy to make it appropriate to their situation and thus more likely to meet their real needs. Involving stakeholders in project design is important specifically for:

• inspiring them to identify, manage and control their own development aspirations, and so empower themselves;
• ensuring the project goals and objectives will be relevant and, as a result, meet the real needs of the rural poor;
• ensuring the project strategy is appropriate to local circumstances;
• building the partnerships, ownership and commitment needed for effective implementation.

Local participation early on can also be cost-effective in the long run. In Uganda, more time and money were spent to involve primary stakeholders in a more inclusive formulation process of the District Development Pilot Project, which was then found to be effective because of local inputs and ownership and a deeper understanding of the project. If the investment hadn’t been made up front, much money would have to have been spent later for one-way information campaigns before and during project implementation.
Box 3-1. Community participation in the project design process

When the irrigation specialist of Zebilla District, Ghana, shared his plans for the rehabilitation of the earthen dam and irrigation network in the village of Saka, the village water users’ association (WUA) quickly sent him back to the drawing board! Many years before, when the dam was first constructed and functioning, the village had established a substantial mango orchard directly below it. Even though the dam had not been working for the past 17 years, the mangoes had continued to produce each year. With the start of the IFAD-supported LACOSREP project, the villagers had formed self-help groups, elected a WUA and requested their dam to be rehabilitated under the project. The project’s irrigation specialist then recommended cutting down most of the mango trees to make room for an expanded irrigation scheme just below the dam. The community objected, as the mangoes were valued, especially during the dry season. One older man explained, “With the mango trees, I know that my children will have something to eat during the lunch break at school.” The villagers suggested extending the canal beyond the mango orchard instead. This way, not only would the orchard be saved, but the canal would expand the amount of cultivable, irrigated land.

The first step in project design is to conduct an initial stakeholder analysis (see Annex D for more detail). This requires listing potential stakeholders (individuals, social groups and organisations), prioritising who must be involved (and not everyone who it would be nice to involve) and agreeing with them on how they can best be involved. This is the basis for being able to understand their needs. Box 3-2 lists questions developed by a project in Tanzania to guide an analysis of stakeholder needs.

Box 3-2. List of questions to outline multi-stakeholder-level strategy for the Participatory Irrigation Development Project in Tanzania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Household Level</th>
<th>District Councils (DCs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* What is the present situation of the farm household?</td>
<td>* What is the present situation of the DCs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What does the future, improved situation of the farm household look like?</td>
<td>* What does the future, improved situation of the DCs look like in terms of mandate, structure and services offered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What changes have to be undertaken at farm household level?</td>
<td>* What changes have to be undertaken at the level of the DC and district-level project management unit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What support do farm households need?</td>
<td>* What support do DCs need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What support do farmers and members of the water users’ association need?</td>
<td>* Who is to provide the support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Who is to provide the support?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Users’ Association (WUA)</th>
<th>Programme Coordination Unit (PCU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* What is the present situation of the WUA?</td>
<td>* What is the present situation of the PCU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What does the future, improved situation of the WUA look like?</td>
<td>* What does the future, improved situation of the PCU look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What changes have to be undertaken at the level of the WUA?</td>
<td>* What changes have to be undertaken at the level of the PCU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* What support do the WUAs need?</td>
<td>* What support does the PCU need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Who is to provide the support?</td>
<td>* Who is to provide the support?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stakeholder participation in design is not limited to working with local communities or valuing their views above others. The idea of a “community” that one consults is quite simplistic and can cause problems. For example, if implementing partners or project staff consult a community, will all local voices be heard? Which ones will unintentionally be forgotten or ignored? Also, what is good for one community is not necessarily good for another or for its region. So which community will you listen to if they have differing opinions? Understanding differences within and between local communities means listening, listening and listening again – and working together. Only then can you gain insights into local relationships and interests.

Some people think that illiteracy and geographic isolation of target groups makes participation impossible. But many examples show how including the poorest, most isolated and illiterate of groups is possible with some creativity and time (IFAD/AGNGOC/IIRR 2001 publication, see Further Reading).
Good participatory processes involve sharing perspectives and negotiating differences. Stakeholders can be involved in many ways, including comprehensive participatory rural appraisal (PRA) processes, informal discussions and planning workshops. However, people’s physical presence is not enough. Some very poorly designed projects have included many local people who did not participate freely. Ensuring high-quality participation is key and will require creating project structures that can respond to people’s requests (see Box 3-3).

**Box 3-3. New project structures in Colombia to create space for participation**

The PADEMER project in Colombia negotiated several recommendations when refining the project at start-up: 1) changing focus from supply to demand, wherein project activities start with a participatory process of identifying rural microenterprise demand for services, 2) introducing competition through open tenders for service delivery, and 3) forming regional groups for selecting and prioritising projects, with primary stakeholder representatives invited to assist in selecting and supervising service delivery contracts.

Good project design requires questioning, sharing and negotiation. This happens when good information is available and when differing perspectives between community people, scientists, NGO staff and government officers are discussed openly and negotiated. Planning workshops with stakeholders are important, and a good process, understood by all, will help achieve a valuable outcome.

Some projects focus on a single workshop. This creates pressures; and agreements may be made that do not make much sense afterwards. It might be tempting to think that, because such outputs came from the stakeholders during the workshop, they are “correct” and cannot be changed. However, people learn by participating in dialogue. The views they held in one meeting might change. The next day, after having had a chance to reflect and discuss with others at home, they might see things quite differently. So rather than a one-off workshop, it’s better to hold a sequence of events where people’s ideas can be shared and merged, and informed agreement can be reached (see Box 3-4).

**Box 3-4. A workshop process for participatory logframe design in Uganda**

Ugandan project staff recommend the following workshop process for developing the logframe. At the beginning, they draw a diagram that shows the process in terms of steps to be undertaken through the workshop. This includes scanning the project environment, developing the vision, mission, goals and purposes (impacts) for the project, and then filling in the details of outputs and activities. By referring back to the visual diagram of the workshop process, participants can see the progress they are making in working through the LFA steps. The workshop lasts about two to three days. At the end, participants find they have worked through the whole logframe matrix themselves.

### 3.2.2 Be Clear about Cross-Cutting Issues: Poverty, Gender, Participation

A shared understanding by stakeholders of the concepts of poverty reduction, gender equity and participation is critical. It is the only way to secure agreement on how to build these concepts into the project strategy. Differing understandings can lead to diverging objectives. For example, in one project in Yemen, concerns were raised about the CACB’s (Cooperative Agricultural Credit Bank) apparent lack of commitment to the project target group of small farmers. Then project staff discovered that the CACB was defining as eligible all small farmers within the project region. However, the project was targeting only those from 47 specific villages involved in project shelterbelt activities, as named in the project design documents. Different definitions had caused frustration and disrupted monitoring of credit activities.

Defining what these three concepts mean for the intended implementers is the first step. M&E experiences in India revealed that the intention to target the poorest of the poor was not always fulfilled because the official criteria for “below poverty line” (BPL) were inadequate for...
A GUIDE FOR PROJECT M&E

the project. An NGO there used the official criteria in “wealth ranking” and “wealth mapping” methods to check the proportion of village members from poor households against the status of households who had not joined the self-help groups (SHG). They found that many households not in the SHGs did not meet the BPL criteria, yet they were still living in relative poverty.

Agreeing on terms like “poverty” and “basic necessities” is essential both for good project design and M&E. Opportunities for reaching agreement need to be created. For example, the ADIP project in Bangladesh took a group-based extension approach and kept close ties with NGOs and local agencies in the project design. This created good opportunities for agreeing on poverty indicators that guide some M&E.

The same is true for “gender” and “participation” (see Section 2.7). Even when everyone agrees on these concepts at the onset, they need to return to them regularly to limit deviations from a goal in poverty reduction and equitable development. Nevertheless, differing opinions may remain, as the activities based on these definitions are implemented in the organisational context of each stakeholder group (see Box 3-5).

Box 3-5. Definitions in an organisational context

In one project area in North Africa, the president of a rural community, who also worked in local government, was involved in linking project staff and local people. He found it difficult to justify investing the limited project resources only in poor households. Instead, he tried to spread out project resources to as many people as possible, especially those who were motivated and capable of completing what the project had started. He explained, “For the land rehabilitation work, we have the resources to remove stones on one hectare of land per household, so we choose people with more than one hectare who will be able to remove the stones from the rest of their land with their own resources.” People with more land and capacities were not the poorest, but the strategy was understandable. The local government, in which he worked, had the mandate to organise service delivery for the majority of citizens rather than to the project target of only the poorest.

3.2.3 Plan for Capacity Development and Sustainability

Many IFAD-supported projects focus on delivering infrastructure and public facilities—wells, roads, covered markets, clinics, school buildings, etc. But it is the people who use and maintain a structure. A major lesson learned by development agencies over the past 25 years is that investing in capacities is at least as important as in infrastructure for sustained poverty reduction. An interesting example of what this may mean in practice comes from the WUPAP programme in Nepal. Its overall purpose is “To assist in self-empowerment and in strengthening the capacity of poor and socially disadvantaged groups of people to: mobilise and increase their own resources; gain access to external resources; claim social justice.” [Emphasis added.]

To ensure this focus, questions to consider during project design and adaptation are:

1. Whose capacities are being built through the project?

2. Will these capacities reduce rural poverty?

3. If not, what else do we need to do in terms of capacity-building to have a lasting local impact?

Some people think that capacity development simply requires counting how many people attend training workshops. But attending a workshop does not necessarily strengthen capacity. Building capacity requires conscious effort to share decision-making with primary stakeholders over time (see Box 3-6).
Box 3-6. Participation and capacity-building for sustained impact

The Cuchumatanes project in Guatemala worked with organised farmers: formal organisations, interest groups and communal banks. In 1998, a beneficiary committee was created to strengthen their participation in project management. It supervised field activities and collected beneficiaries' claims. When the project finished in 2000, the beneficiary committee became an association called the Association of Organisations of the Cuchumatanes.

Monitoring and evaluating capacity-building is not as straightforward as counting infrastructure changes. "Capacity" is sometimes difficult to describe clearly in ways that will allow measurable indicators and may therefore require additional creative thinking. Box 3-7 compares performance indicators for Nepal’s NWUDP rural infrastructure component with indicators from a similar component in a project in China. Note that including a capacity-development focus requires a participatory M&E approach – only the stakeholders themselves can explain if and how capacity might have been built. For example, capacity is not about how many kilometres of road have been built, but how stakeholders are going to ensure that these roads are maintained, used and extended.

Box 3-7. Comparing indicators that foster capacity development with ones neutral towards it
(Note: the italicised words indicate where capacity development is made explicit.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Output</th>
<th>Performance Indicators in the Project Logframes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **NWUDP Nepal** Infrastructure programme implemented | • Number of small-scale or micro irrigation schemes constructed/rehabilitated and maintained  
• Kilometres of trails and number of bridges constructed/rehabilitated/ maintained  
• Number of community facilities (including storage facilities) constructed and maintained  
• Number of water supply and sanitation schemes constructed/rehabilitated and maintained  
• Number of disadvantaged groups successfully expanding irrigated area and the per cent by which the irrigated area increased  
• Kilometres of rural roads constructed/rehabilitated and maintained: 75  
• Per cent of labour for earthworks provided by the target group identified by the communities and social mobilisers: 70 (of which at least 50% are female)  
• Number of disadvantaged people employed through component |
| **China Project** Rural infrastructure constructed or rehabilitated | • Number of beneficiary households served by new domestic water supplies: 25,000  
• Kilometres of rural road network upgraded to class 4: 198  
• Number of villages supplied with electricity: 67  
• Number of household biogas systems installed: 22,500 |

Including a capacity-development perspective has implications for policy, as existing policies can be questioned when local people take more charge of their own situation. By explicitly linking project activities to specific policies, the project team has the opportunity to engage and provide feedback to policy makers. The ADIP project in Bangladesh found this when it aimed to implement the government’s New Agricultural Extension Policy. In the process, the project created opportunities for informing government on the policy itself. This link has two advantages: providing beneficiaries with a voice at policy level and ensuring that local capacity-building stays in tune with the current policy outlook.

Good capacity-building is essential for sustained impact. Three points need particular consideration.

1. A broad base. Capacity-building must include not only primary stakeholders but also other key stakeholders, particularly local government (see Box 3-8).

2. The plan for phasing-out. Project managers in India have systematic phasing-out plans that list specific responsibilities to be able to show sustainable outcomes for their investments in local development.
3. Sensitivity in M&E. Tracking and evaluating capacity development is particularly sensitive because it focuses on people and makes judgements about their activities.

Box 3-8. From project focus to supporting local governance

The terms of reference for M&E expertise in Uganda's District Development Support Project (DDSP) focused only on the project. Staff recognised that this could easily be changed to become a local government M&E framework that benefits the district as a whole. For the consultant to contribute to the district, and not just the project, he/she should:

- know and understand the local government system in Uganda;
- work closely with the DDSP team to create a multi-level, multi-stakeholder M&E system for the planning, allocation and implementation needs of the local governments. This would include mentoring the district planning units and other departments to help their partners/other stakeholders develop their own indicators for the M&E of local government services;
- ensure that the roles and responsibilities fit within existing local government/authority roles and responsibilities (so as not to create unsustainable committees, organisations or positions);
- have documentation and dissemination skills to assist local governments to develop communication strategies for meeting their constituencies' learning and information needs; for example, assist by documenting the local government's M&E framework for wider dissemination and use by other districts in Uganda.

In this way, there can be a shift in focus from short-term project learning to the development of longer-term institutional change.

3.2.4 Plan for Learning and Adaptation During Implementation

Any project will require many adjustments during its life. This is guaranteed. Do not overly detail a project strategy, as this hinders adjustments during implementation. Here are some ideas for a design team to build learning opportunities and change into the design.

- Design the process, as well as objectives, at the higher levels (also see next point). Identify the forums and processes that will be used to involve stakeholders in project review and adaptation, and build in flexibility to respond to unplanned opportunities. This approach was used to advantage by the TEPP project in Yemen to involve emerging stakeholder groups in information-gathering and feedback. Local communities had a strong sense of group action. When local youths saw what the project was beginning to develop, they started to participate voluntarily in certain aspects, lending a hand with seedling protection, community health and water supplies. The project was able to involve them in implementation and M&E, and so gained valuable support and informal feedback on the field situation.

- Focus on clear goals (impacts) and purposes (outcomes), rather than over-specifying activities and outputs. Project design teams commonly over-specify activities and spend time on the overall goal, then they fill the in-between steps with hastily formulated purpose(s) or outcomes. Yet these interim levels are the most important part of “managing for impact” so require most of the attention. This approach can also have secondary benefits, as was seen in Ghana where the second phase of a project was designed to be less targeted and more flexible. Project management and the cooperating institution were given the authority to adjust the components and outputs in the design to respond to locally expressed targets. This more flexible design also increased the involvement and ownership of the project by the primary stakeholders.

- Be explicit about uncertainty. Instead of trying to force specificity, explain what you simply do not yet know, such as exactly how communities will want to administer local development funds. Explain what is unknown and how and when project management should be clear on the issues. This means suggested targets should be approximate. State quantitative targets as being approximate and describe how the project could revise them, if necessary. For example, the logframe of the WUPAP programme in Nepal explicitly states: “As the programme is
demand driven, the output targets remain highly indicative and in some cases are not specified in detail... The logframe should be regarded as indicative, as it will need to be reworked by its stakeholders in the course of implementation.

- Build in mini-research phases at key moments. Not all issues of relevance to a project can be anticipated ahead of time. List as an activity and budget for “focused studies” to answer questions about the project context that may arise. For example, if the project is testing a new kind of micro-credit scheme, then before this is expanded a focused and detailed interim evaluation is needed.

- Make it explicit that the project strategy and logframe matrix should be revised each year. Annual adjustments to the logframe are increasingly accepted and expected. A project design can indicate when and with whom this will take place.

- Make “adaptive management” a key function in the terms of reference for senior management and partner contracts. When hiring managers and selecting partners, select those who can balance uncertainty with being clear about poverty reduction goals.

- Budget for experimentation and for the unexpected. If the project is testing a new approach, then the budget should reflect this and more money should be allocated to later years when there is more certainty about expanding the approach. Also leave a portion of the budget and staff time for activities that do not fit into established categories. In some companies that must innovate to survive, researchers can spend 10% of their time on activities of their own choosing. This allows them to respond to unexpected opportunities.

### 3.3 Introducing the Logical Framework Approach

The logical framework approach (LFA) can be very useful for guiding project design and implementation. The basic ideas behind the LFA are simple and common sense for any design process.

1. Be as clear as possible about **what** you are trying to achieve and **how** it will be achieved.
2. Decide how you will know if you are achieving your objectives and put in place a monitoring system.
3. Make explicit the conditions (assumptions) outside the direct control of the project that are critical for the project to succeed and assess the risk for the project if these conditions fail to arise or change.

The LFA also has some limitations. The main criticism is that it can lead to a rigid and bureaucratically controlled project design that becomes disconnected from field realities and changing situations. However, the LFA is easy to use more adaptively, particularly if the original design is seen, at least in part, as needing future finalisation and probably revision, and project management prioritises annual reviews and logframe updating.

The logframes of IFAD-supported projects vary widely in their quality, application and terminology. Design teams using the logframe for IFAD-supported projects commonly experience difficulties. These arise because IFAD-supported projects are long term, aim at high-level poverty reduction goals and aim to undertake a wide range of development activities. These features require a fine balance between too much detail and oversimplification. So in practice, a summarised logframe will be useful to provide an overview of the project and for those making decisions about project funding. For those using the logframe as a management tool, more detail will be needed.
When facilitated well, the LFA is generally seen as very valuable by project stakeholders (see Box 3-9) and leads to a better quality and shared understanding of needs, objectives and strategies by all involved. When possible, try to follow the basic ideas without forcing everyone to understand the full detail of the logframe matrix. Visually mapping out the process steps can make them clearer than using the four-column table format. It may also be a good idea to avoid some official terminology, finding local words instead. Some people may be scared off by terms like “logframe” and “objectively verifiable indicators”. These practices all lend to flexible use.

Box 3-9. Usefulness of the logframe, as seen by primary stakeholders

When members of the water users’ association of the PIDP project in Tanzania were asked their opinions on the logical framework approach, they gave the following comments:

- “It makes planning easier.”
- “Now we have a plan for the year. It helps us in scheduling and priorities.”
- “With this kind of meeting [LFA process] we get time to sit together with the technical staff and the farmers to talk about our problems and the solutions to our problems. It is a teaching approach to solving problems.”
- “It was difficult to understand in the beginning. But then when you understand, it is easy for planning.”
- “Unlike the first projects [previous development projects], now we have indicators so that we are able to judge our achievements. The problems from the first project had been continually carried over until now.”

3.3.1 Key Steps in the Logical Framework Approach

While most people are familiar with the logical framework matrix, the most important part of the LFA is actually the planning process that has been developed to improve the quality and clarity of project design.

There are various versions of the steps in the LFA. The one presented below takes account of the specific nature of IFAD-supported rural development projects. The key steps to be undertaken – with well-selected and diverse stakeholders – are:

1. establish the general scope or focus of the project;
2. agree on the specific planning framework, terminology and design process;
3. undertake a detailed situation analysis;
4. develop the project strategy (objective hierarchy, implementation arrangements and resources);
5. identify and analyse the assumptions and risks for the chosen strategies, modifying the project design if assumptions are incorrect or risks are too high;
6. develop the monitoring and evaluation framework.

Each step is discussed in more detail in the next sub-section, with detailed examples of the logframe matrix in Annex B and of the M&E matrix in Annex C.

3.3.2 The Logical Framework Matrix

The written output of the LFA is the logframe matrix. The standard matrix is a table with four rows and four columns. This matrix summarises:

1. what the project should achieve, from the level of an overall goal down to specific activities;
2. the performance questions and indicators that will be used to monitor progress and overall achievement;
3. how these indicators will be monitored or where the data can be found;
4. the assumptions behind the logic of how activities will eventually contribute to the goal, plus associated risks for the project if assumptions turn out to be incorrect.

Table 3-2 shows a logical framework matrix appropriate for IFAD-supported projects and consistent with ideas in this Guide. Alternative, commonly found terms used in the matrix are given in parentheses. Note that inputs required for activities to be carried out are written at the activity level in the second column (Performance Questions and Indicators) – the column is not for indicators. The table also suggests how to write the objectives in the hierarchy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective Hierarchy</th>
<th>Performance Questions and Indicators (Objectively verifiable indicators, indicators, targets)</th>
<th>Monitoring Mechanisms (Means of Verification, sources of information)</th>
<th>Assumptions and Risks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Performance questions and indicators at goal level – high-level impacts</td>
<td>How necessary information will be gathered</td>
<td>For long-term sustainability of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Overall objective, development objective)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The long-term objective, change of state or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improved situation towards which the project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is making a contribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write it: put the verb in the past</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tense, as something already achieved over the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Performance questions and indicators for each purpose (component) – lower-level</td>
<td>How necessary information will be gathered</td>
<td>Assumptions in moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Project development objective)</td>
<td>impact and outcome indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td>from purposes to goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The immediate project objective, the overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observable changes in performance, behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or resource status that should occur as a result</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>of the project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write it: put the verb in the present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or past tense, as if already achieved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
<td>Performance questions and indicators for each output – output indicators</td>
<td>How necessary information will be gathered</td>
<td>Assumptions in moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Results)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from outputs to purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The products, services or results that must be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivered by the project for the component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objectives and purpose to be achieved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write it: put the verb in the present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or past, as if already achieved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Note: the needed inputs go here, not indicators for activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assumptions in moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actions taken by the project that are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from activities to outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>required for delivery of the outputs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write it: put the verb in the infinitive,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as something to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When using the logframe flexibly for IFAD-supported projects, two issues are important: (1) knowing how to use the matrix for large projects or programmes and (2) making sure outcomes are adequately considered.
Using the Matrix for Large Projects or Programmes

Many IFAD-supported projects involve diverse components, including health, infrastructure, extension support, irrigation development, micro-finance, organisational development and social justice. Each of these different elements could be considered projects in their own right, although they are often closely linked. So some IFAD “projects” are more like programmes, in the sense that they involve a diverse range of loosely-coordinated initiatives being implemented by different groups for the same overall goal.

Three problems occur when large and multidimensional projects (or programmes) are summarised into a four-by-four logframe matrix.

1. The project is oversimplified to such an extent that the matrix provides insufficient detail for effective management or M&E.
2. Outcomes, outputs and activities tend to become confused. For example, what might be an overall outcome for the irrigation component is written in the matrix as an output of the project; then, what are really irrigation-related outputs are included in the matrix as project activities.
3. Insufficient detail is given at the purpose level in defining the outcomes needed to guide the project strategy towards impact (see Section 2.3).

You have three options for overcoming these problems (see also Table 3-3).

• Introduce multiple purposes for the project. With projects that have a number of components, each component then has a separate purpose. This is commonly done with IFAD-supported projects. (Be aware that some versions of the LFA only allow one purpose per project). Try to avoid viewing large project components as outputs. An output is a specific deliverable product or service, whereas a project component is broader and is achieved by the delivery of a series of outputs.

• Use the idea of a “cascading logframe”. View your project in terms of one master logframe matrix, with a series of smaller, linked logframes (or sub-projects).

• Extra level of objectives. Introduce an extra layer into the logframe matrix between “Outputs” and “Purpose”, which could be called “Component objectives” or “Key outcomes”. Many projects already implicitly or explicitly work with this idea but do not include it in the logframe matrix.

The most common version of the LFA suggests only one purpose per project. However, the size, range of components and long timeframe of IFAD-supported projects means that having a single project goal and only one project purpose is not helpful. Therefore, many IFAD-supported projects have moved to using multiple purposes that relate to each of the major components. It is this model of the logframe matrix that guides the examples in the Guide.

Another problem of concern in complex projects is the difficulty of including cross-cutting concerns in a linear objective hierarchy. For example, you may want to pay particular attention to women’s empowerment in project activities. Setting up an output layer around gender equity may isolate gender, when what you want to do is integrate gender into all activities. Yet you cannot ignore this output as distinct, since it risks leaving out indicators for assessing performance on the gender front.

This dilemma can be overcome by including separate cross-cutting objectives or principles. Sometimes these fit into the logframe in an integrated manner. If not, they need to be included in the project document and preferably as an attachment to the matrix. Being

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1This is now a standard approach by AusAid’s (Australian bilateral aid agency) approach to the logframe.
explicit about these cross-cutting objectives or principles is important in order to include them not only in activities but also in M&E.

Table 3-3. Three options for adjusting the structure of the logframe matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard objective hierarchy</td>
<td>Four levels: 1 x goal, 1 x purpose, any number of outputs, any number of activities per output</td>
<td>• Is very simple.</td>
<td>• Oversimplifies larger, multi-component projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Is commonly used and understood.</td>
<td>• Does not make project outcomes clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cascading logframes (objective hierarchies)</td>
<td>Several interlinked, standard four-level logframes; each project component written up in a separate logframe; the purpose level = the component objective</td>
<td>• Maintains the standard four levels of the logframe matrix.</td>
<td>• Doesn’t give an overview of cross-cutting objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The standard is one purpose, so this may cause confusion.</td>
<td>• Focusing on integrative impact is difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enables a focused, “sub-project” approach to management.</td>
<td>• Is more complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra layer(s)</td>
<td>Five levels: 1 x goal, 1 x purpose, any number of key outcomes (or component objectives), any number of outputs per outcome, any number of activities per output</td>
<td>• Makes a clear distinction between output, outcome and purpose levels, facilitating M&amp;E.</td>
<td>• More detail has to be included in the logframe matrix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Is consistent with standard LFA.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recognising the Importance of Outcomes

Your project may have one output that is formulated as: “improve the capacity of the agricultural extension service and the skills of extension workers”. Many projects use an indicator such as “number of extension workers trained”. But if you want to manage for impact, you need to know the extent to which extension staff are using new skills in the field and, in turn, the extent to which farmers are developing and adopting improved agricultural practices. These are outcomes that occur after you have achieved your outputs (number of extension agents trained) and are necessary in order to have impact (increased productivity and income for farmers). If your M&E data show that although many extension workers have been trained, farmers are not adopting improved practices, then you can question what might be going wrong with your strategy of improving the extension service through training. This is why monitoring change at the level of outcomes is so critical in managing for impact.

For IFAD, outcomes are also recognised as lower, purpose-level impacts. So, for communication and reporting reasons, it is important not to limit the documentation of impact to only the goal level of the objective hierarchy.

Most people who use the standard LFA and matrix focus on tangible outputs. Outcomes should be included as indicators at the purpose level, but this is rarely done well. This is partly because the logframe was originally designed to focus on controlling the delivery of tangible outputs to be produced, such as kilometres of road built or area of irrigation scheme constructed. The three ways of dealing with larger projects, mentioned above, all help make the outcome level more explicit and detailed and also easier to monitor and evaluate.
3.4 Using the Logical Framework Approach

3.4.1 Step One: Establish the General Scope and Focus of the Project

The starting point for any project is to identify the general situation that will be improved, the likely beneficiaries and stakeholders, the geographic scope of the project, the range of issues that will be addressed, and the likely length and expenditure of the project. Also find out what the community, government and potential funding agencies’ interests are in the project. This initial information provides the starting point for defining and guiding the detailed situation analysis and design steps. Some of this information will be outlined in the Country Strategy Paper (COSOP).

During this initial step, it is important to find out if the basic concept underpinning the project is feasible and if there is sufficient support from key stakeholders for it to be worthwhile to proceed to the next step.

3.4.2 Step Two: Decide on the Planning Framework, Terminology and Design Process

As already discussed, there are different planning frameworks and various approaches to the use of the LFA. In different countries, people will have had experience with different models and be used to a particular set of terms. It will help everyone if early on in the design process there is agreement about the approach to planning that will be followed, how the logframe will be used and what terminology will be used.

Also define clearly what the design process will be, in terms of who will be involved, how and at what stage; what information needs to be gathered and how; and how the final design will be checked with key stakeholders. Box 3-10 lists key elements of participatory design based on IFAD experiences in Asia.

This “designing the design process” step is often given very little thought and is the source of many problems that emerge during design and implementation.
Box 3-10. Weaving together a participatory design phase (based on IFAD experiences in Asia)\(^2\)

- Establish a mentoring team – a group of committed, experienced and respected nationals who, on a voluntary basis, act as resource persons to advise the formulation process and champion the goals, strategies and approaches proposed by the project.
- Undertake a participatory stakeholder analysis through a process of brainstorming with groups/individuals/institutions, grouping stakeholders, assessing their interests and impact on project success, assessing their influence and importance for project success, and outlining a strategy for their participation.
- Establish the design team with national specialists from different professional sectors, relevant NGOs and government agency staff.
- Train the design team in the use of diagnostic participatory tools and in drawing implications for project design from qualitative discussions with groups of stakeholders.
- Review secondary data and key informant interviews.
- Formulate the study design and analysis plan based on the information gaps you have identified.
- Divide the project area into study zones, by identifying a number of relatively homogenous agro-ecological areas.
- Undertake village-level problem identification and needs assessment through focus-group meetings and household interviews:
  - Assess problems: discuss problems, issues and concerns of villagers; assess causes and effects; identify which issues could relate to the project being planned; agree on criteria for prioritising problems; and prioritise problems.
  - Analyse options: discuss strategies and options proposed/desired by the community to overcome the problem situation.
  - Analyse alternatives: agree on criteria for comparing options to overcome problems and realise visions; then identify and assess alternative strategies/options available to reach the desired objectives.
- Undertake a cross-cutting analysis, by agro-ecological zone and socio-economic stratum, to integrate analyses from different communities.
- Hold design workshops involving different levels of stakeholders to work together on the logframe matrix:
  - Summary of objectives (objective hierarchy): develop project concept, vision, mission, results and activities.
  - Indicators: together identify which indicators capture and measure the different levels of changes the project is anticipated to affect.
  - Means of verification: agree on the sources of information to be used for monitoring impact.
  - Important assumptions/external factors: discuss the attitudes, behaviours, processes, trends, natural hazards/disasters, etc. outside the control of the project that could affect it positively or negatively.
- Conduct continual surveys of beneficiary opinions to ensure that the consultation process and the interim results are as good as possible.
- Hold national-level project reality-check and planning workshops to which a wide range of (primary) stakeholders are invited and during which initial ideas are presented and debated to consider different realities.
- Draft the project proposal, based on workshop outputs, with a team of national and international experts.
- Verify the draft project outline with the key stakeholders, particularly the intended primary stakeholders, in a series of discussions or workshops.

3.4.3 Step Three: Undertake a Detailed Situation Analysis

Situation analysis involves learning as much as possible about the project context and the interests and needs of local people in order to design a relevant project. This learning is best if done with several groups of stakeholders. Box 3-11 provides a list of key situation analysis topics, questions and useful methods.

The standard LFA focuses project planning on developing a problem tree for the situation. A problem tree works well for simple situations. However, problem-based planning fits with a more mechanical approach to development where projects are designed to “fix” problems rather than to facilitate local development processes. Furthermore, people see their future in terms of visions and aspirations – not just as problems. Analysing future visions helps identify opportunities for improvement and of successes that can be further developed. The LACOSREP water users’ association (WUA) programme in Ghana developed four complementary visions to describe the ideal WUA that they were aiming to help create.

A good situation analysis will combine information gathering and analysis about the local context, expert advice and participatory processes such as participatory appraisals, community meetings and multi-stakeholder workshops. A creative and learning-oriented situation analysis will combine several methods (see Annex D).

One result of a good situation analysis is that stakeholders have more insights about their situation and have better capacity to design a solid project. However, this will not be achieved in one community meeting. People's perspectives evolve as they debate and listen. After a community meeting, subsequent discussion in people's homes might have lead to adjustments if a meeting were held the following day. Take care that the situation analysis is designed as a series of events.

Updating the situation analysis is critical for the M&E system. Note that a situation analysis is not the same as a baseline survey. Both are information-gathering exercises. But a situation analysis is more open-ended in terms of the themes and questions that are analysed, while a baseline survey only includes data that are needed to make impact-related comparisons. A baseline survey is undertaken after project design has been completed, while a situation analysis is undertaken as part of design.

Box 3-11. Key themes, questions and methods (italicised, see Annex D) for a thorough situation analysis with stakeholders

**Stakeholders** (stakeholder maps, institutional diagrams, secondary data)
- Who are the local people likely to benefit from the project?
- Who are the other key stakeholders?
- How do different stakeholder groups interact?
- What are the power relations between different groups?

**Problems and Issues** (rich pictures, conceptual maps, focus group discussions, historical analyses, secondary data, matrix ranking)
- What problems or issues are central to the focus of the project?
- What are the main problems or concerns of the different stakeholder groups and how do these relate to the focus of the project?

**Visions and Opportunities** (rich pictures, role plays)
- What changes would different stakeholder groups like to see the project bring about?
- Generally, what visions, hopes or dreams do different stakeholders have and are there implications for the project?
- What opportunities do stakeholders see for realising their visions?

**Biophysical Setting** (maps, transects, field visits, seasonal calendars)
- What are geographical characteristics of the project areas?
- What are the climatic conditions?
- What are the main forms of land use?
- What are the environmental problems or risks?

**Organisations** (institutional diagrams, network diagrams, flow charts, matrix ranking)
- What are the important government, business and NGO organisations?
- How effectively are these organisations performing?
- How are the different organisations linked together (power relations, communications, joint work, competitors)?

**Infrastructure** (resource maps)
- What are the key infrastructure issues for the area?

**Legal, Policy and Political Institutions** (rich pictures, institutional diagrams, historical analyses, focused interviews, secondary data)
- What legal factors are significant for the project?
- What government policies and programmes are significant?
- What are the main government and political structures and processes in the area?

**Economic** (wellbeing ranking, daily activity charts, seasonal calendars, secondary data)
- What is the economic situation of local people?
- What are the main forms of economic livelihood?
- What are the key characteristics of the local economy?
- What are the market opportunities and constraints?

**Social and Cultural** (historical analyses, focus group discussions, SWOT analyses)
- What are the main social and cultural conditions relevant to the project?
3.4.4 Step Four: Develop the Project Strategy

With a good understanding of the situation, you are now ready to start developing the project strategy. This simply explains clearly what everyone hopes to achieve and how it will be achieved. A project strategy includes the objective hierarchy, implementation arrangements and resources required. This sub-section focuses on the objective hierarchy - column one of the logframe - central to the strategy. The objective hierarchy is a tree-type structure that maps out how activities and outputs contribute to the project purpose(s) and goal (see Figure 2-4 and the method description in Annex D).

A project strategy will only work well if it is logical. This means that all the outputs required to achieve a particular purpose have been correctly identified and, in turn, that all the activities needed to deliver an output have been identified. For example, you cannot have as your output “production and certification of seed of improved varieties”, without also including “testing and setting up private production of seed” and “training of ministry of agriculture staff for certification” as activities. Once the objective hierarchy is drafted, the logic needs to be tested (see Table 3-4).

The standard LFA uses a very structured method of converting a problem tree into an objective tree or hierarchy. When working with project visions and in more complex situations where the problem tree becomes unwieldy in size, you could use a more open and iterative approach. The main steps in developing an objective hierarchy are outlined below and described in Annex B with a detailed example.

1. Define the project goal. This should reflect the longer-term and highest-level impact to which the project will contribute.

2. Identify the purpose(s). This is what must be achieved by the project in order to contribute to the goal. The purpose level generally describes major changes in behaviour or capacity. Because a project can contribute to the goal in many ways, the stakeholders will need to decide what is most worthwhile and feasible for this particular project. It helps to establish criteria to help make these decisions.

   It is good practice to include a separate purpose for project management. Here, key project management tasks can be included as outputs (see next step), such as staff management, financial management, plant and equipment maintenance, and M&E.

3. Establish necessary outputs. For each purpose, identify what outputs are necessary for the purpose to be achieved. Think of it a bit like designing a car. If a key part is left out, like the wheels or the engine, it will not matter how good the rest of the car is - it still will not work. Also you do not want tractor wheels on a car or a motor-bike engine in a big tractor. In other words, make the outputs fit the real needs and avoid outputs that are not absolutely necessary. Any purpose can be achieved in several ways. Think creatively and analyse the advantages and disadvantages of different options before making a choice.

4. Identify activities. Each output is delivered via a set of activities. At the initial project design stage, the best way of achieving purposes and outputs may be unclear, so activities may need future finalisation and probably revision.

5. Check the logic. Once the objective hierarchy has been drafted, use the logic testing questions in Table 3-4 for checking and finalisation.

6. Allocate resources required for activities and develop an overall budget.

7. Develop a work schedule for the main activities over the life of the project and establish key milestones.

8. Establish the management and operational arrangements, with key responsibilities and working procedures.
Developing a good project strategy does not happen in one go from top to bottom. You will need to return to earlier steps as thinking becomes more detailed. For example, when you start thinking about the cost and practicality of some activities you might realise that some outputs and purposes might be unrealistic. Box 3-12 lists some mistakes to avoid when drafting the objective hierarchy.

### Table 3-4. Logic testing questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Logic Testing Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Goal  | ✓ Does the goal express some future desired state or higher-order impact towards which the project is contributing?  
✓ Does the goal help to place the project in a wider context that provides the rationale for the project?  
✓ Is the goal narrow enough that it is meaningful given the scope of the project? Avoid goals expressed at an excessively general level.  
✓ Is the goal something owned and shared by relevant stakeholders? |
| Purpose (if a single purpose) | ✓ Is the purpose a succinct statement of what the project will achieve overall?  
✓ Is the purpose realistic given the resources, time span and working context of the project? |
| Purposes (if multiple purposes) or Outcome or Component Objective (if an extra level is included) | ✓ Are the purposes/component objectives the set of main outcomes necessary to achieve the purpose? In other words, if the outcomes/component objectives are achieved will the purpose be achieved?  
 ✓ Do the purposes/outcomes/component objectives reflect the highest-level achievements of the project for which it can realistically be accountable?  
 ✓ Are the purposes/outcomes/component objectives realistic for the project to achieve during its lifetime?  
 ✓ Is there a set of practical actions that can be carried out to achieve each purpose/outcome/component objective?  
 ✓ Is one of the purposes/outcomes/component objectives dedicated to effective project management? |
| Outputs | ✓ Do the outputs together describe the set of achievements that must be realised for the outcome/component objective to be realised? In other words, if the outputs are achieved will the outcome/component objective be achieved?  
 ✓ Are any outputs unnecessary to achieve the outcome/component objective or logically belong under another outcome/component objective?  
 ✓ Are the outputs realistic for the project to achieve during its lifetime?  
 ✓ Is there a set of practical actions that can be carried out to achieve each output? |
| Activities | ✓ Do the set of activities for each output reflect the main actions that must occur for the outputs to be achieved?  
 ✓ Are any activities included that are unnecessary for achieving the outputs or that logically belong under another output?  
 ✓ Are there any activities that need to be split up and partly allocated to different outputs?  
 ✓ Are the activities all roughly equivalent in terms of their level of detail? In other words, are you sure that some activities are not more at an output level while others are at a task level?  
 ✓ Is the list of activities manageable (not too long)? |
| For All levels | ✓ Are all levels understandable to project stakeholders and expressed as plainly and succinctly as possible?  
 ✓ Are any unnecessary means of achievement included?  
 ✓ Are there between three and about seven items for each of the (outcome/component objective, output and activity) levels? |
Box 3-12. Common mistakes to avoid when formulating the objective hierarchy

- Defining overly ambitious goal/purposes, given local conditions and available resources and capacities
- Overlooking key activities and outputs that are needed to achieve higher-level objectives (outcomes/purpose/goal)
- Poor logic as to why particular activities are needed for a certain output or particular outputs for a certain purpose
- Objectives expressed too vaguely to know what will be achieved or how to implement ideas
- Inclusion of principles, such as “stakeholder participation” or “gender equity”, as separate purposes or outputs, instead of integrated into project activities
- Confusion in the levels of the objective hierarchy

As far as possible, make each level in the objective hierarchy SMART (see Box 3-13). Remember that the logframe is only a summary of a more detailed description and justification for each level of the project strategy in the appraisal report. Try to make each statement in column one of the logframe as specific as possible. Additional targets can also be included as indicators in column two of the logframe.

To avoid blueprint planning, remember that outputs and purposes are not only physical, such as roads, irrigation schemes or yield increases, but also include dialogue processes and capacity development. You can include approximate targets and explain that these will become more precise after the participatory planning processes at start-up that will lead to clearer understanding of primary stakeholders’ priorities.

Box 3-13. Ensuring you have SMART objectives

The goal, purpose, component objectives, outputs and activities should be SMART if they are to be impact oriented:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant (to the project purpose and goal)
- Time-framed

But don’t get too SMART!

- What is achievable may need to be developed from experience.
- Good ideas take time to develop.
- Not everything that is worth doing can be easily measured.

The project strategy is something with details that evolve over the life of the project. For example, at start-up a more detailed project strategy is necessary than for appraisal, and even more detail is required for an annual work plan and budget.

Developing a clear, logical and feasible project strategy is worth all the time and analysis that is invested. Very often project staff – understandably – are impatient to “get started”. However, if actions are based on a shared clear understanding of the project strategy, then they will be more easily directed towards achieving the desired impact. Without this understanding, team members may end up doing good but isolated bits of work that do not reinforce each other.

For example, in one Indonesian project, both a logframe and a work plan were produced, but they bore little relationship to each other and the logframe was therefore not used optimally by the project.

3.4.5 Step Five: Identify and Analyse Assumptions and Risks

Assumptions, in the fourth column of the logframe, are the logframe “orphan” (see Box 3-14). They often receive little serious thought or time. Yet assumptions are the very backbone of the
project strategy. They specify the necessary conditions (if-then relationships) outside the direct management control of the project that must exist for the project to achieve its objectives. They are fundamental to the overall logic of the project and therefore to project success (see Section 2.3, Box 2-9). Ideally, think about assumptions as you develop the objective hierarchy and do this again with the full draft.

Assumptions are only important when they describe conditions that – if they do not occur – may jeopardise the project’s success. Many logframe matrices only note assumptions that are extremely obvious, general and often very probable, such as: “national security maintained”, “free market policies”, “foreign exchange bottlenecks”, “limited flexibility of government administration” and “environmental degradation”. These are not useful for giving strategic guidance to a project.

Box 3-14. Assumptions column: the “rubbish bin”

According to an M&E consultant in Uganda, the assumptions column of the logframe is like “the rubbish bin where everything goes”. Instead of dealing with them as an integral part of the project, design teams tend simply to throw all the institutional aspects in this column. This means that such issues are not dealt with by the project staff who then see them as being beyond project control. More time is needed in the planning process to analyse the assumptions and think about what could be done with them.

Most projects recognise the importance of assumptions that show up as problems during project implementation. Many of these can be identified during project design, helping improve it. They are not recognised when a situation analysis is absent, has not been thorough or has not been analysed well enough to tease out the underlying assumptions. For example:

- In one project, one of the main targets was “non-rice cropping area increased by 10%”. It was only during implementation that the project became aware that the target group of small farmers did not have access to any additional land for planting such crops. Verdict: poor situation analysis.

- Another project had the output “radio programs developed and aired” and as an assumption “communities have access to radio media”. Communities did not, in fact, have radios. Verdict: poor situation analysis.

In both cases, the assumptions should have been checked out before the outputs were affirmed. If they had been, and it had turned out that the communities did not have necessary access to land or radios, the outputs would either have been thrown out or redesigned. For instance, in the latter case, outputs might be redrawn to provide radio access and the extra budget this would require.

Risks are the reverse of an assumption. One look at the assumptions for a project will give an idea of the level of risk that the project is taking. The more assumptions there are, the more improbable they are and the more they are out of the project’s control. This makes the risk of project failure higher. One project had as an assumption “the annual rainfall is above the annual average for the region”. If project success is based on this assumption (which may have been developed in haste without much thought), then it is certainly a high-risk project.

Good M&E needs clear, valid assumptions. When a certain objective is not realised or problems occur, you will often find a faulty assumption is the cause. Part of good M&E means keeping a close check on the validity of assumptions. Here are a few tips to make assumptions a useful management tool:
• Think of assumptions first as risks. When identifying assumptions, you might find it helpful to start by thinking of possible risks to the project. For example, if you think that a risk for the project is “non-delivery of contracted services on time by project partners”, then this would appear in the logframe matrix as “project partners will comply with their contracts on time”.

• Consider assumptions about: performance of public agencies, performance of private organisations, performance of NGOs/CBOs, performance of contractors/consultants, performance of funding agencies, policy environment, natural events, world or domestic markets and prices, and war/civil disturbance.

• You cannot observe a large number of assumptions. Limit the number of assumptions to only those that are most critical for success. After listing all possible assumptions, filter out those that are not important to project success and those that are almost certain so don’t demand monitoring. A useful method for assessing the importance of assumptions is through the use of a risk assessment analysis (see Figure 3-1).

• Focus on those assumptions about whose probability you are uncertain. Such assumptions need to be monitored as they may seriously endanger the project if they turn out not to be true. Examples of such assumptions from project logframes include: “larger lessees are cooperative”, “beneficiaries will be effective in the management of their newly acquired land”, “climate fluctuates within normal ranges” and “community abides by fishery regulations on size of nets”.

• Check that the assumptions are clearly outside the control of the project. Use a decision tree for this (see Figure 3-1). The process of formulating assumptions is very important. It helps in checking that the project strategy is on course to achieve its purpose, having considered in its design as many components as possible that assumed factors might affect. If you realise that assumptions can fall within the control of the project, you can use them to indicate additional outputs and activities in the logframe matrix. The following assumptions, taken from IFAD-supported projects, could all have been tackled as part of the project strategy: “department of agricultural extension staff motivated”, “nutritious feed available” and “monitoring reports are based on contextual analysis”.

• If important assumptions are very unlikely to be true, then these are “killer assumptions”. The project must be redesigned to remove these assumptions. An example of a killer assumption is: “training of extension agents will lead to more uptake of new technologies by farmers”. This cause-effect assumption needs to be dealt with by the project because it is, in fact, very unlikely that lack of knowledge is the key constraint for extension agents (you don’t know if you have enough people whom you could train nor if they are the right people). It is also extremely likely that farmers face many other constraints to the uptake of technologies, not just extension agents’ knowledge.

• Revisit your assumptions regularly, at least during the annual review, to adjust or remove those that are no longer valid and add those that have emerged. A reflective participatory project will formulate new assumptions as the strategy changes and initial results become clear. Compare your M&E data to the assumptions to see if there are contradictions that need to be removed. For example, you might assume that a 25% increase in household income would lead to less illegal firewood collection. When the monitoring data show that incomes are up by 35% and such firewood collection is still at the same level, then you need to rethink the project logic if you want to reduce deforestation. Increased local purchasing power could be stimulating the demand for more firewood. You can probably conclude that “increasing incomes” is not the best strategy for “reducing illegal firewood collection”.

3.4.6 Step Six: Develop the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The final step is to develop the monitoring and evaluation framework for the project. The key performance questions and indicators are summarised in column two of the logframe and the main monitoring mechanisms in column three. However, remember that this is only a summary of the overall M&E framework. The details of setting up the M&E system are the subject of the remainder of the Guide so will not be discussed further here.

3.5 From a Logframe Matrix to an Annual Work Plan and Budget

Translating a project strategy, as worded in the logframe matrix, into an operational annual work plan that is clear to project staff and partner organisations transforms ideas into actions. An operational plan is detailed enough when staff and implementing organisations know what they are expected to do, when and how.

3.5.1 What is the AWPB?

The most important operational and planning tool of a project is the annual work plan and budget (AWPB). The AWPB guides daily implementation and includes:

- Work plan: a logframe-based description of each activity/output/indicator per component;
- Schedule or time plan: specifying when activities are to take place and in what order;
- Budget: identifying the cost of each output and activity per component;
- Personnel plan: identifying responsibilities, additional staff needs, staff training;
- Material/equipment plan: requirements for each output and activity per component, including procurement.
The AWPB describes the annual commitment of the project towards the communities, the government and IFAD. The AWPB is normally integrated into ongoing government budget processes. With that, the AWPB has acquired legal endorsement and forms the formal base for implementation and release of funds (for IFAD funds and counterpart contributions). In some countries, immediately after AWPB approval, required counterpart funds are released to the project.

The AWPB process is usually initiated before the fiscal year ends and is based on experience gained at the field level during implementation. With the detailed AWPB, the importance of the project appraisal report fades away over the project’s lifetime. After the first year, it is no longer useful for planning, except for general guidance on objectives, principles and approaches. The project appraisal report does, however, remain an important evaluation reference point, as AWPBs do not include references to long-term objectives and general principles.

The AWPB sits within the framework of the loan agreement, which can be amended when required. Changes come from the experiences of all project participants, who prepare the AWPB based on experiences and actual performance results. The first AWPB usually relies on the project appraisal report, updating details such as prices and actual requirements. Subsequent AWPBs are best when prepared during a participatory review and planning workshop process. Communities and project and partner staff jointly review performance of the past year. The outcomes of these discussions form the basis for participatory, goal-oriented planning for the next AWPB.

In an increasing number of projects, AWPBs are preceded by participatory appraisals during which beneficiaries with the guidance of project staff, identify their community’s needs, resources and priorities. These form the basis for “community action plans” that are the building blocks for higher-level plans (e.g., district or ward) from which the project derives its AWPB (see Box 3-15).

The AWPB not only guides the project for a year but is also the mechanism by which the project can review the experiences of the previous year and make modifications accordingly. It adapts the project’s operational plan to the current situation and specifies for the year: the outputs to be achieved, the activities to be undertaken to achieve these outputs, the resources required to undertake the activities and the costs of these resources as well as the institutions with financial responsibility. The AWPB should be the basis on which IFAD, the cooperating institution and project participants will assess implementation progress.

### 3.5.2 Preparing the AWPB

To prepare the AWPB, information is drawn from the project appraisal report, the loan agreement, any specific strategic plans, and plans and reports of previous years. AWPBs are produced for each level of participants in the project, starting with the project primary stakeholders according to their needs and demands using a bottom-up participatory process. At the highest level, preparation of the AWPB should be made just before government funding allocations for the following fiscal year, to give a clear indication of the funds required by the project.

To develop an AWPB, here are some basic steps (also see Box 3-15):

1. Take the activities from the revised project logframe matrix and list them in the first column of the work plan. List them in terms of which activity is needed in order to do others. Clarify them further and add sub-activities, if needed.
2. For each (sub-) activity, specify the following: milestone – what is to be done by when, who is responsible for implementing it and for checking it, when it should start and finish, staff requirements in terms of person-months, quantity of material and equipment needed, cost and cost category and important assumptions.

3. Check the plan by ensuring that the total cost is within the budget (see Box 3-16) and that people are not overloaded or forgotten in terms of responsibilities (or that there are gaps or contradictions). Also make sure that timing is realistic and consistent. You cannot have the same person or piece of equipment scheduled at the same time!

4. Do the above with the main stakeholders to ensure a shared sense of responsibility (see Boxes 3-15, 3-16 and 3-17).

5. Compile the final consensus into the AWPB document (see Table 3-5) and send this to the appropriate body for approval, including a “no objection” from the cooperating institution.

The AWPB is the basis for more detailed operational planning: work plans per project component, per staff member, per month/quarter/half-year, etc. Some projects use Gantt charts to show when activities are to happen during the year. However, these charts do not show other important information, such as responsibility and resources, so other charts are also needed (see Annex D).

**Box 3-15. The development of the AWPB in a Tanzanian project**

- **Step 1.** Needs listed and prioritised (based on available resources) during village annual meeting.
- **Step 2.** Village plans are reviewed further to rank priorities based on available resources from villages and donors operating in the ward.
- **Step 3.** Annual planning workshop (2-3 days) is held with DPO staff, donors and others (NGOs). They meet to develop a district-level plan and budget, using the LFA process and incorporating all activities to be implemented by various donors.
- **Step 4.** The project identifies the part of the district plan that may be implemented with project resources, forming the AWPB. Approval for the AWPB is sought from the project steering committee.
- **Step 5.** The project team selects the villages in which to work, based on criteria such as: communities ready to mobilise beneficiary contributions, only villages not supported by another project, etc.

**Challenge:**

The steps do not guarantee participation. The people you invite and how discussions are facilitated do!
Box 3-16. Participatory revision of the budget and project strategy

Even simply integrating the budget with the logframe can, as project staff in Uganda found, prove difficult. At a participatory workshop on developing the logframe, the participants were in a hurry simply to plug in the numbers and leave. Project staff had to encourage them to justify the expenses as part of the wider strategy and activities. Not surprisingly, the budget was far beyond the resources available. To reduce the budget they had to review their thinking process and identify those activities which most contribute to the outcomes they wanted to see. This process of backtracking helped the participants explain and justify why the activities were important and what would not be undertaken if not for external resources.

Box 3-17. Validating and documenting the planning system in Nicaragua

Tropisec in Nicaragua developed a guide that summarised their participatory planning and M&E system. The guide was an important resource for the project management unit and implementing partners, covering the concepts and procedures to be considered during their relationships, organisation and verification of actions. The system and guide were validated in several joint workshops, where it was recognised that neither should limit the creativity and innovative capacity of stakeholders. During the project lifetime, both the system and guide were modified based on suggestions for improvements from stakeholders and a formal M&E review by implementing partners. The guide became more user friendly, suggesting basic tips for grassroots organisations and implementers in general.

Table 3-5. Example table of contents for an AWPB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>Summary of project objectives, area and components that focuses on the strategy to reduce poverty. Describe any critical issues or recommendations resulting from changes in policy, government directives or supervision missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Analysis of implementation to date</td>
<td>Description of progress made, problems experienced, adequacy/inadequacy of project inputs, lessons learned for each level of logframe. Indicate any adjustments needed to the logframe and justify them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Budget summary</td>
<td>Consolidated budget: summarised per project component, per output, per district/facilitation unit and at national and overall project levels. Explain how components are to be financed by different stakeholders: government, primary stakeholders, IFAD and other funding agencies, as well as what each stakeholder is contributing to each component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall work plan</td>
<td>For each component, an explanation of what is to be funded, rationale, strategy, expected outputs and any changes from last year’s AWPB, outlined following the logframe format. Explain which of these relate to needs prioritized by primary stakeholders and which needs are left out and why. Summarise the process to be followed for primary stakeholder participation in the coming year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Output/activity plans</td>
<td>Plans for each component, including what is needed in terms of project support and coordination and training activities for project/partner staff and primary stakeholders; how plan implementation is to be monitored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Procurement plan</td>
<td>Types of facilities and equipment to be purchased, quantities, cost, destination and description of purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Contracted services plan</td>
<td>Technical assistance, NGO and private sector services to be contracted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Required plan and budget</td>
<td>Output/activity budget: definition of the input requirements for carrying out the activities, by component and by expenditure category. This is directly related to the work plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall schedule (Gantt chart)</td>
<td>The period during which activities are to be undertaken and outputs to be achieved, who is responsible and key milestones for the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>Outlines of formats: output/activity plan, output/activity budget, indicators and monitoring schedule, contracted services monitoring, training activities monitoring, implementation progress monitoring, financial status, project status summary, credit analysis, project outputs summary and calendar of activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6 Outlining M&E During Initial Project Design

3.6.1 How Initial Project Design Influences M&E

Unintentionally, M&E is often set up to fail during initial project design. How? For example, there is not an adequate budget for M&E, insufficient time and expertise have been allocated to M&E during the start-up phase, or there is insufficient flexibility in the project design to enable the M&E system to influence the project strategy during implementation.

Initial project design influences M&E through:
1. the relationships and commitment established with partners and local people, particularly the intended primary stakeholders;
2. the logic and feasibility of the project strategy;
3. the resources allocated to M&E (funding, time, expertise);
4. the degree of inbuilt flexibility;
5. the operational guidelines for M&E.

Let's consider each point.

First, during project implementation, the effectiveness of M&E will be greatly influenced by the attitudes and commitment of local people and partners involved in the project and how they relate and communicate with each other. Individuals or organisations that have been active in the design phase are more likely to know if the project is genuinely in their interests and to understand the objectives. They are more likely to take an interest in monitoring the progress and achievements of the project. Alternatively, if people have been disillusioned, frustrated by or left out of the design process, then they are less likely to be interested in and committed to M&E activities.

In practice, projects experience considerable delays between design and start-up and related changes regarding who is involved. Nevertheless, the experience and legitimacy of the design process will have lasting consequences for implementation. The definition of clear responsibilities may also require the formation of new institutions or groups/units within institutions to undertake them. The appraisal report of the PADEMER project in Colombia defined the coordination component as including the shaping of a national technical coordination unit “that will integrate the functions of the monitoring unit with the evaluation unit and will be framed within the national evaluation system”. It further stipulated that this coordination unit would be responsible for the annual work plan, the systemisation of information on project progress to guarantee timely decision-making by the management, and the preparation of relevant reports. Box 3-18 describes the importance of relationships and organisational structure for laying the foundation for effective M&E.

Box 3-18. A weak basis for effective M&E

In the initial project design of the TEPP project in Yemen, the project M&E department was not part of the project-management organisational structure. Instead, it fell under and was directly responsible to a government agency with a long-established M&E unit of its own based on national guidelines. Similarly the project director was also directly responsible to the chairman of the agency. This structure meant that the M&E unit had no direct access to resources and relied on minimal government funding. So no M&E reporting was undertaken. M&E activities required approval via a complex hierarchy of top-level managers. As the M&E department was responsible to the agency, relationships with project management were sensitive. This further affected the M&E budget, project incentives for M&E and adoption of M&E recommendations by the project. To make matters worse, project M&E was based on the existing government system without necessarily holding relevance to project specificities. This was compounded by the fact that project M&E staff were also responsible for M&E activities of other projects under the auspices of the government agency.
The second design fault is when a project lacks logic in its strategy or has unrealistic objectives, making good M&E almost impossible. This is because the evaluation questions and indicators often become quite meaningless and will not produce useful information. Furthermore, if you don’t know clearly where you are heading then you will not know how best to use any information that might be produced. A good M&E system can help put a poorly designed project back on track, but this creates considerable extra work during start-up and implementation.

The third is when the design team does not allocate enough resources to the M&E system (see Section 7 for more on budgeting). Critical resources include: funding for information management, participatory monitoring activities, field visits, etc.; time for a start-up phase that is long enough to establish the M&E system, do a participatory baseline, train staff and partners, include primary stakeholders in M&E and monitor and reflect; and expertise, such as a consultant to support M&E development. As the design team, you must negotiate the level and extent of M&E that is possible for a given budget. Then you can make a detailed M&E budget.

The fourth factor is critical if M&E systems are to generate the learning that helps a group of project partners continually improve implementation and strategy. The more rigid a project design is, the more difficulty the project team will have in adjusting it as a result of changes in the context and understanding of interim impacts. As the design team, identify how flexible you feel the project design needs to be and what the boundaries of and processes for design adaptation should be. A project with inbuilt flexibility provides an important rationale for the M&E system.

Fifth, it is important that during design, the broad framework of the M&E system is established. Then everyone’s expectations about his or her responsibilities and information rights can be clear. The next sub-section indicates what could be included in the documentation that describes the M&E system in the project appraisal report.

### 3.6.2 Documenting M&E in the Project Appraisal Report

The last M&E-related step for the design team is writing down the suggested M&E framework in the appraisal report. How this is done can strongly affect the start-up of the project (see Box 3-19).

**Box 3-19. Implications of how the M&E system is documented at appraisal**

The appraisal report of one project had included the design of a baseline survey and even the follow-up survey, but not the overall M&E system, specific targets by activity or a systematic way for data collection. According to the project staff, “The design of the project does not include a full description of how an M&E system looks and functions, nor what it would produce.” Due to this, although the M&E unit existed before the project became effective, the data collected were not directly relevant to project objectives. It was more than a year after the start of field implementation that a supervision mission drafted a performance-indicator framework based on the AWPB targets, and constructed a more elaborate logframe. Also at this time, a technical advisor was appointed, which stimulated the construction of a database, prototype forms for data collection and so on.

Table 3-6 outlines what to include in the appraisal report as related to the M&E framework. This can serve to guide the writing process. As management functions relate to project M&E and implementation, so the M&E component of the appraisal report may either be included as a separate section or be integrated into a section on project organisation and administration and/or management. The main point is that the more the M&E component is integrated into the management system, the more useful and effective it may be.
### Table 3-6. Suggested contents lists for the M&E component in a project appraisal report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Heading</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Overview of purpose of this section of the appraisal report plus a summary of key innovations and potential obstacles for the project implementers to consider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Specific Project/Context Features that Affect M&amp;E</td>
<td>Features affecting the resources required for the M&amp;E unit to remain viable, including, for example, geographic coverage and level of in-country communication systems; other contextual features: the range of project components and the project organizational hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. M&amp;E Purpose and Scope</td>
<td>Broadly defined purpose and scope of M&amp;E in the project context, including the project M&amp;E needs and the information to be generated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Key Performance Questions, Indicators, Information-Gathering Requirements and Implications for the M&amp;E System</td>
<td>List of possible key questions and indicators for the goal, purpose and output levels, plus generally described information gathering and organising methods to enable resource allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Internal Self-Evaluation Processes (input/output monitoring, ongoing evaluation and impact evaluation)</td>
<td>General outline of key processes, tasks and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. External Evaluations (ongoing and impact evaluations)</td>
<td>The frequency of external evaluations and how the project will be integrated into this evaluation process, including special evaluation studies or thematic studies that might be needed at key moments in the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Intended Primary Stakeholder and Partner Participation in M&amp;E</td>
<td>Including the early identification of stakeholders for their involvement in M&amp;E planning at start-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Structures and Staffing for M&amp;E</td>
<td>Approximate staffing levels and types, roles and responsibilities related to activities, and a clear description of the organisational structure of M&amp;E and its interaction with other project sectors, particularly with project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Capacity-Building for M&amp;E</td>
<td>Types of support needed to create sufficient appropriate M&amp;E capacity among project stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Information Management</td>
<td>Any specific information management systems that are recommended for the project context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Process for Detailed Planning of M&amp;E during Start-Up</td>
<td>Including draft timeframe for development of the M&amp;E system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Communication Strategy</td>
<td>Broad description of key audiences and types of information that should be communicated to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Budget</td>
<td>Approximate budget for key items (staff time, materials, evaluation and training events, publication/documentation, consultants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendices**

- M&E Responsibilities of Project Management
- Terms of Reference for those Responsible for M&E and for Consultants Providing M&E Support
- Detailed M&E Budget
Further Reading

Sites for overview of logframe or objective oriented planning:

- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). See publications section (in multiple languages) online at: www.sdc.admin.ch.


List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
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Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
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Setting up the M&E System
Section 4. Setting Up the M&E System

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  4.1.1 Seeing M&E as a System
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4.2 Key Steps in Setting Up the M&E System
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4.4 Quality of your M&E and Keeping it Updated

Further Reading

Key Messages

- M&E needs to be understood as an integrated reflection and communication system within the project that must be planned, managed and resourced – it is not simply a statistical task or an external obligation. An M&E system requires:
  1. Designing and set-up;
  2. Gathering and managing information;
  3. Reflecting critically (on experience and information) to improve action;
  4. Communicating and reporting results.

- For the M&E system to function, you must have adequate resources and put in place the necessary conditions and capacities. This often involves capacity-building.

- A well-functioning M&E system helps guide the intervention strategy and ensure effective operations for all key stakeholders. It is one part of the overall management of the project.

- Each stage of the project cycle requires certain key M&E tasks to be carried out by specific stakeholders.

- A detailed M&E plan is developed during project start-up and needs to be documented clearly and shared with those who are to implement it.

- The M&E system will itself need to be monitored and updated regularly during the life of the project.

This Section is useful for:

- Managers – to help them ensure that staff, partners and consultants are carrying out their M&E jobs effectively;
- M&E staff – during start-up, to know how to create and initiate an operational plan for a comprehensive M&E system and procedures; and, during implementation, to know how to support partners and consultants in fulfilling their M&E responsibilities;
- Consultants – when designing the M&E component – to ensure that it is comprehensive enough and has sufficient resources, capacities and inbuilt flexibility – and also when reviewing and updating the M&E system;
- IFAD and cooperating institution staff – to ensure that all key aspects of the M&E system are in place.
4.1 Overview of Setting Up the M&E System

4.1.1 Seeing M&E as a System

A well-functioning M&E system manages to integrate the more formal, data-oriented side commonly associated with the task of M&E together with informal monitoring and communication, such as field staff sharing impressions of farmer experiments with their manager over morning coffee. If you can see M&E in this way – as an integrated system of reflection and communication supporting project implementation – then you can plan for and manage it over the entire life of the project. However, M&E is often seen as a statistical task or a tedious external obligation of little relevance to those implementing the project. It is also common to see projects separating the monitoring function from the evaluation function. In such cases, the higher-level, impact-related assessments are sub-contracted and the project focuses only on tracking short-term activities, thus limiting opportunities to learn if they are having a strategic input.

Seeing M&E as an integrated support to those involved in project implementation requires:

- creating M&E processes that lead to clear and regular learning for all those involved in project strategy and operations (see Box 4-1);
- understanding the links between M&E and management functions;
- using existing processes of learning, communication and decision-making among stakeholders as the basis for project-oriented M&E;
- putting in place the necessary conditions and capacities for M&E to be carried out.

Box 4-1. Planned components of the M&E system in WUPAP (Nepal)

In Nepal, the WUPAP programme has identified a wide range of activities it must integrate into its monitoring and evaluation system. This includes standard work plan practices and project-specific innovations:

- critical events agenda
- work planning and budgeting
- financial monitoring and auditing
- process monitoring
- stakeholder workshops
- political situation monitoring
- primary stakeholder surveys
- external evaluations
- participatory context analysis
- progress and performance monitoring
- participatory impact monitoring

Figure 4-1 illustrates the M&E system and how it links to other key elements of a project. For M&E to be effective, four core tasks need to be fulfilled:

1. Designing and setting up the system;
2. Gathering and managing information;
3. Reflecting critically to improve action;
4. Communicating and reporting results.
Although Figure 4-1 shows the four tasks as a sequence, in reality they overlap. For example, a project or component manager may be discussing field observations with staff over morning coffee. In this situation, he or she gathers field observations from different people, they reflect on them together, and then share the information with others all at once. On the other hand, the production of the annual progress report will involve a more structured process with separate steps – information gathering during the year, a participatory project review process where the information is discussed and analysed, and writing the report.

### 4.1.2 Linking M&E to the Overall Project

The figure below illustrates how the M&E system fits within the project. In Section 2, the idea of “managing for impact” was explained in terms of four elements: guiding the project strategy towards achieving impact, ensuring effective operations, creating a learning environment and setting up and using the M&E system. Figure 4-1 focuses on the M&E element and how it links with the two elements, project strategy and operations. The remaining element – learning environment – is the context that influences how a project and its M&E system are implemented.

**Figure 4-1. The M&E system and how it links to the project strategy and operations**

1. The **project strategy** (the plan for what will be achieved and how it will be achieved) is the starting point for project implementation and setting up the M&E system (see Section 3).
2. The strategy is the basis for working out the **project operations** required to implement activities efficiently and effectively.
3. The completion of project activities leads to a series of actual **outputs, outcomes and impacts**. Comparing the actual outputs, outcomes and impacts with what was planned in
the project strategy and understanding the differences in order to identify changes in strategy and operations is a core function of the M&E system.

4. The **M&E system** consists of four interlinked parts.

   4a. **Setting up the M&E system** by identifying information needs to guide the project strategy, ensure effective operations and meet external reporting requirements (see Section 5). Then you need to decide how to gather and analyse this information and document a plan for the M&E system. The process of working out how to monitor and evaluate a project inevitably raises questions about the project strategy itself, which can help improve the initial design. Setting up the M&E system with a participatory approach builds stakeholders’ understanding about the project and starts creating a learning environment.

   4b. **Implementing the M&E system** means gathering and managing information (see Section 6). You can do this through informal as well as more structured approaches. Information comes from tracking which outputs, outcomes and impacts are being achieved and checking project operations (e.g., activity completion, financial management and resource use). After information gathering and management starts, you will need to solve problems or will have new ideas for improving the initial M&E plan.

   4c. **Involve project stakeholders in reflecting critically** (see Section 8). Once information has been collected it needs to be analysed and discussed by project stakeholders. This may happen formally – for example, during the annual project review workshop. Or it may happen informally – for example, by talking with farmers about their ideas during weekly field visits. In these reflections and discussions, you will probably notice information gaps. These can trigger adjustments to the M&E plan to ensure the necessary information is being collected.

   4d. **The results of M&E need to be communicated** to the people who need to use it. Only then can you call the M&E system successful (see Section 6). This includes reporting to funding agencies but is much broader. For example, problems experienced by field staff need to be understood by their manager. Project progress and problems must be shared with project participants so you can identify solutions together. Reports to funding agencies need to balance successes and mistakes and, above all, be analytical and action-oriented. Some of those who are to use the information may have been involved in collecting data and/or analysing part of it. However, you need to plan how to inform those who were not involved.

5. Ultimately the **results from M&E - both the communication processes and the information - will improve the project strategy and operations**. Senior management is responsible for seeing to this with the support of M&E staff. Sometimes improvements can be immediate. For example, extension staff may be complaining one day about a vehicle maintenance problem, which the project manager can act on directly. Or there may be a need to change the sequence of certain activities, which the responsible unit manager has the flexibility to do. But sometimes more extensive negotiations may be required between the project director, the supervising ministry, the cooperating institution and IFAD. For example, if a supervision mission notices major problems with an entire project component, such as micro-credit, changes to the loan agreement may be necessary.

So for M&E to work as a tool for managing for impact, project management and the M&E staff need to be clear on how to identify, agree upon and follow up on project improvements. If this process for guiding change is not in place, even a very good M&E system will not have much value for the project.
4.1.3 Key M&E Tasks during the Project Cycle

Considering M&E as a system helps in understanding the range of M&E tasks that different people will need to undertake during the project cycle. The list below looks formidable indeed. But look closely at it and you will probably recognise that you are already implementing many of the tasks as part of your M&E responsibilities. Furthermore, these tasks are specific for each stage of the project and most of them will be shared among a range of people.

Note that these M&E tasks are not the sole responsibility of M&E staff or an M&E unit, if the project has these. Rather, they should be seen as functions for which responsibility is to be shared. This makes it critical to give careful thought to whom to involve in each one. Making the M&E system and processes more participatory means sharing these functions. This, in turn, makes shared learning through M&E possible.

Figure 4-2. Key M&E Tasks

| Early design phase (formulation and appraisal) | • Establish the scope and purpose of the M&E system.  
• Indicate key performance questions and indicators, plus associated monitoring mechanisms.  
• Identify organisational arrangements for M&E.  
• Develop terms of reference for M&E staff.  
• Indicate the process for how M&E is to be established during start-up.  
• Establish an indicative M&E budget.  
• Document the above in the M&E framework. |
| Start-up prior to loan effectiveness (with the Special Operating Fund) | • Revise performance questions, indicators and monitoring mechanisms after reviewing the project strategy.  
• Organise training with staff and partners likely to be involved in M&E.  
• Initiate baseline studies, as appropriate.  
• Prepare a project implementation manual with key staff. |
| Start-up after loan effectiveness | • Review project design in relation to M&E with key stakeholders.  
• Develop a detailed M&E plan, taking into consideration existing mechanisms with partners.  
• Put in place necessary conditions and capacities for M&E to be implemented. |
| Main implementation | • Ensure information needs for management are met.  
• Coordinate information gathering and management.  
• Facilitate informal information gathering and communication.  
• Support regular review meetings and processes with all implementers.  
• Prepare for supervision missions.  
• Prepare for and facilitate the annual project review.  
• Conduct focused studies on emerging questions.  
• Communicate results to stakeholders.  
• Prepare annual progress reports. |
| Mid-term review (MTR) | • Collate information for the mid-term review.  
• Facilitate the internal review process to prepare for the external review process.  
• Help respond to MTR feedback.  
• Adjust the M&E system, as necessary. |
| Phasing out and completion | • Assess what the implementers can do to sustain impact and sustain M&E after closing down - and implement these ideas.  
• Hold workshops and do field studies with key stakeholders to assess impacts.  
• Identify lessons learned for the next phase and/or other projects. |
Each project will need to modify this list to suit its operating conditions. Box 4-2 shows one example of project-specific M&E functions in Guatemala. Another example is from the SAIP project in Bangladesh, where M&E specialists were hired during start-up to work with project management to design and operate the M&E system. The M&E specialists also took responsibility for developing the impact-monitoring methodology and reaching agreement on indicators, with the participation of NGOs and primary stakeholders. Since this project was focusing primarily on participatory development, there was the vital need for a thorough introduction to participatory impact monitoring at an early stage. It was the responsibility of the M&E specialists to draw up and implement a training plan for M&E staff at district and field levels.

Yet another example comes from Benin. At project start-up, the M&E coordinator developed a manual for guiding the project’s monitoring and evaluation process. The manual provides formats for recording revenues from income-generation activities, details on collecting data for the indicators, and information on how field extension agents, NGOs and heads of departments should report. The manual is considered to be an evolving process, influenced by the experiences of people using it. So revising it will be a recurring M&E task at later stages.

Box 4-2. M&E functions through which the Cuchumatanes project (Guatemala) learned about and adjusted its work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Elaborating monthly and half-yearly reports on physical and financial progress, based on an automated monitoring database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elaborating monthly progress reports for the national information and planning system of the ministry of agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Operating the automated monitoring system on the outcomes of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Permanent updating of the primary stakeholders database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elaborating standards and rules concerning use of the M&amp;E information (for quality assurance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carrying out annual self-evaluation events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carrying out annual participatory evaluation workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carrying out internal evaluations of the project management unit (PMU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Undertaking SWOT (see Annex D) analysis of the project, its components, its internal functioning mechanisms and implementing organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participating in thematic studies to understand more about the appropriateness of the intervention strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elaborating the terms of reference and supporting special evaluations on key aspects of the intervention strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carrying out emergent evaluations on critical aspects that arise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carrying out unplanned, occasional evaluations on an as-needed basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participating in ongoing operational fieldwork activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.4 Responding to Unplanned Needs and Requests for Information

So far, M&E has been discussed as if it were a process that can be planned entirely ahead of time. However, most project M&E units will often receive sudden demands from the project manager, ministries, steering committees and funding agencies to provide a report on a specific issue, or some other type of information.

When developing the budget, include a budget line for unplanned costs, say a 10% contingency allocation. Leading corporate research organisations typically save part of the research budget and time for projects that do not fit into the established categories. Sometimes up to 25% of the research budget is left open to ideas that do not fit into existing categories. Alternatively, you can top off specific budget lines with resources for unplanned activities. For example, you can add two weeks per year for consultants to deal with focused evaluations or monitoring questions that might be requested during the year. Also plan in extra time for key staff to deal with unplanned M&E-related requests. Three days per month, for example, may seem like a lot. But, in practice, even more days are quite commonly required.

In Cuchumatanes, Guatemala, the M&E unit carries out what it calls “emergent evaluations”, which the project director requests when more information is required about certain activities. The M&E unit produces “alert reports” that highlight the need for extra information. Some additional thematic evaluations or research studies are contracted out. Among the emergent evaluations thus far, were case studies about organisational issues, an evaluation of the communal banks programme and an evaluation of environmental impact.

During project design, include a category in the appraisal report such as “sudden opportunities” or “M&E contingency” and identify the upper budget and time limit for unplanned M&E activities. If managers keep track of the time and money spent on unplanned M&E activities and see that the limit has almost been reached, then they can more easily explain to those requesting additional reports or information why it is not possible to respond to all demands.

4.2 Key Steps in Setting Up the M&E System

The six steps involved in designing an M&E system are:

1. Establishing the purpose and scope – why do we need M&E and how comprehensive should our M&E system be?

2. Identifying performance questions, information needs and indicators – what do we need to know to monitor and evaluate the project in order to manage it well?

3. Planning information gathering and organisation – how will the required information be gathered and organised?

4. Planning critical reflection processes and events – how will we make sense of the information gathered and use it to make improvements?

5. Planning for quality communication and reporting – how and to whom do we want to communicate what in terms of our project activities and processes?

6. Planning for the necessary conditions and capacities – what is needed to ensure our M&E system actually works?

A good appraisal report will include an indicative M&E framework that provides enough detail about these questions to enable budgeting and allocation of technical expertise, give funding agencies an overview of how M&E will be undertaken, and guide project and partner staff during start-up. But this will only be indicative and needs to be adjusted and detailed further during the start-up phase (see Box 4-3).

Box 4-3. Design of M&E in the project appraisal of a rural microenterprise development project in Colombia

In the appraisal report for the PADBEMR project, the M&E system was outlined as follows, painting an ideal situation and giving the details required to make it operational at start-up.

The national technical coordination unit (NTCU) of the project should integrate both the monitoring and evaluation functions within the framework of the national evaluation system. The NTCU will be responsible for formulating the annual work plans and budgets (AWPBs), systematising information on project progress to guarantee timely decision-making by management and preparing relevant reports. The monitoring unit (MU) should ensure timely provision of information for management decisions. Among the unit’s human and other resources are the M&E head, administrative support and the necessary office and computer equipment, plus a budget to cover consultation costs for specific studies. The MU should ensure that the collection, processing and analysis of information on project progress be available to management, serving its aims. Both the MU and the evaluation unit will undertake valuation activities on progress, their respective responsibilities to be defined. The proposed activities for the MU are: elaborating weekly progress reports with data on project progress and formulating indicators for project monitoring in line with the implementation plan.
Below, you will find the tasks for each step in taking the outline of an M&E system from an appraisal report and designing the details that make it operational (see Table 4-1). More detailed explanations for each step can be found in Sections 5 through 8.

Table 4-1. Tasks needed when detailing the M&E plan based on a project appraisal report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Design Steps</th>
<th>Outputs in Project Appraisal Report (the M&amp;E Framework)</th>
<th>Tasks during Project Start-up to Develop a Detailed M&amp;E Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish the purpose and scope</td>
<td>Broadly defined purpose and scope of M&amp;E in the project context</td>
<td>• Review the purpose and scope with key stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify performance questions, indicators and information needs</td>
<td>List of indicative key questions and indicators for the goal, purpose and output levels</td>
<td>• Assess the information needs and interests of all key stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Precisely define all questions, indicators and information needs for all levels of the objective hierarchy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check each bit of information for relevance and end-use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Plan information gathering and organising</td>
<td>Generally described information gathering and organising methods to enable resource allocation</td>
<td>• Plan information gathering and organising in detail (who will do use which method to gather/synthesise what information, how often and when, where, with whom, with what expected information product).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check the technical and resource feasibility of information needs, indicators and methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop formats for data collection and synthesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Plan for communication and reporting</td>
<td>Broad description of key audiences and types of information that should be communicated to them to enable resource allocation</td>
<td>• Make a precise list of all the audiences, what information they need, when they need it and in which format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Define what is to be done with the information - simply send it, provide a discussion for analysis, seek relevant feedback for verification, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Make a comprehensive schedule for information production, showing who is to do what by when in order to have the information ready on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Plan critical reflection processes and events</td>
<td>General outline of key processes and events</td>
<td>• Precisely detail which methods/approaches are to be used, with which stakeholder groups and for what purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify who is responsible for which reflective events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Make a schedule that integrates all the key events and reporting/decision-making moments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Plan for the necessary conditions and capacities</td>
<td>Indicative staffing levels and types, clear description of organisational structure of M&amp;E, indicative budget.</td>
<td>• Come to a precise definition of: the number of M&amp;E staff, their responsibilities and their linkages, incentives needed to make M&amp;E work, organisational relationships between key M&amp;E stakeholders, the type of information management system to be established and a detailed budget.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Careful thought is needed regarding whom to include when detailing the M&E system. In the first years of the PADEMER project, Colombia, for example, the monitoring unit designed the M&E system. One part of this process included a workshop to define the principle indicators. Participants included: the national technical coordination unit, the implementing NGOs, the Mixed Corporation for Micro-Enterprise Development and members of the management committee (ministries of agriculture and economic development and the national planning department).

The more diverse stakeholders you can include in the process, the more all-round clarity you will eventually have as to what is needed from whom and when. But this will take more time – participation inevitably does!
4.2.1 Purpose and Scope of the M&E System

Clear definition of the purpose and scope of the intended M&E system helps when deciding on issues such as budget levels, number of indicators to track, type of communication needed and so forth. The appraisal report will include a brief M&E purpose statement (see Box 4-4), but you will need to revisit this question at start-up with representatives of implementing partners and primary stakeholders.

Whenever you are unclear about a decision on whether to monitor more or less or whether to choose one methodological option or another, you can return to the stated M&E purpose for guidance. Specifying the purpose also helps to make clear what can be expected of the M&E system, as it forces you to think about the nature of the project and the implications for information needed to manage it well.

Box 4-4. Examples of an M&E purpose statement

The core purposes of the M&E system for the SWA Rural Development Project in Armenia are to provide the information needed for impact-oriented project management and to involve key stakeholders in learning how to improve project implementation. The M&E system will provide regular reports on project progress to the different stakeholder groups in a format appropriate for their needs.

The WUPAP programme in Nepal outlines the main purpose of the participatory M&E (PM&E) element and of the management information system (MIS). "Objective of the PM&E is to support the programme management to ensure compliance with the programme’s strategy and approach, to improve responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness by providing constant feedback from the beneficiaries, programme staff and other stakeholders, and to contribute to the learning of all stakeholders by promoting policy dialogue. Objective of the MIS is to support the programme management in effective decision-making and to improve responsiveness to programme stakeholders by collecting, processing and providing reliable and timely information."

For a project that focuses on building primary stakeholders’ capacity for project management, the M&E purpose statement could be: “The core purpose of the M&E system is to strengthen the capacity of primary stakeholders to manage the resources over which they have decision-making power. The M&E system will provide information on service-provider quality and project progress to the primary stakeholders, furnishing analysis to identify concrete improvements. The system will also provide regular reports on project progress to funding agencies and responsible ministries.”

When formulating the purpose at appraisal or revisiting it during start-up, ask yourself the following question:

- What are the main reasons to set up and implement M&E, for us – as implementing partners and primary stakeholders – and for other key stakeholders?

With a shared understanding of the overall purpose, the next step is to clarify the scope of the M&E system. “Scope” relates to the extent and degree of sophistication of the system. M&E systems can be highly sophisticated, requiring considerable expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods and extensive information management. They can also be very simple systems that rely largely on discussions with stakeholders and do not try to gather large amounts of data.

These different systems will not yield the same results. Each has specific advantages and disadvantages, such as degree of precision and capacity required and labour and cost involved. The sophistication of the M&E system that is appropriate to your situation will depend on your M&E purpose, available resources and M&E expertise. Define the scope of the M&E system by asking:

- What level of funding is potentially available?
- What level of participation in M&E by primary stakeholders and partner organisations is desirable and feasible?
• How detailed does the M&E information have to be, either in terms of quantitative or qualitative data?
• What sort of baseline study is desirable and feasible?
• What are the current M&E capacities among primary stakeholders and partner organisations, and how will this affect the desired levels of M&E?

4.2.2 Performance Questions, Information Needs and Indicators

The most common approach when setting up project M&E is for the M&E coordinator to take each objective and start listing quantitative indicators in the second column of the logframe matrix. This often creates problems. The problems arise not from the quantitative indicators but from the process of jumping directly from objectives to indicators. Many objectives are complex so cannot be summarised in terms of one or a few indicators. Also, while it might be possible for quantitative information to be found that shows if objectives are being met, it does not necessarily explain why and if this can be attributed to the project. Therefore, multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative information are critical to explain what is happening and to look closely at relationships between different pieces of information, rather than single indicators.

Working with performance questions (see Box 4-5) to guide indicator analysis will give you a more integrated and meaningful picture of overall project achievements. Answering these questions requires descriptive analysis and quantitative information. Starting by identifying performance questions makes it easier to recognise which specific indicators are really necessary. Sometimes a performance question can be answered directly with a simple quantitative indicator. However, very often the question can only be answered with a range of qualitative and quantitative information.

Box 4-5. Examples of performance questions

Performance questions are not just about what has been achieved. They also ask why there is success or failure and what has been learned to improve future action. Examples of performance questions include:

• How has the purchasing power of target households changed as compared to non-target groups? What external factors have influenced any changes?
• To what extent are target households better able to meet their housing, education and health needs than non-target households?
• How have the diversity, production and productivity of agriculture in the target area changed as a result of project activities and as a result of external factors?

Performance questions are needed for each level in the objective hierarchy but also for the project as a whole. For example, you will most probably want to ask some questions about the process of project implementation, such as the quality of relationships between certain target groups and implementing NGOs. Or maybe, “How do project partners feel that the project management unit can improve to enable them to carry out their responsibilities?” You will also want to keep track of unanticipated impacts – for example, “Have any of the project innovations been adopted by people in neighbouring districts who are not the main target group?”

Remember that information needs will shift over time, so performance questions will need revision. In projects set up based on the idea of performance questions, the project appraisal report includes a list of indicative performance questions and indicators. After revising the objective hierarchy with key stakeholders at start-up, you can refine these indicative questions together to fit any revisions made to the project strategy.
For most projects, performance questions will not (yet) exist. To develop good performance questions, you first need to be very clear about the project aims. So the process of finding performance questions with stakeholders will help you further refine the project design together.

In IFAD-supported projects, identifying performance questions and selecting indicators increasingly involves the intended primary stakeholders. The process of participatory performance questions and indicator identification is quite different from one that limits itself to the project team. This issue and others about performance questions and indicators are discussed in more detail in Section 5.

4.2.3 Information Gathering and Organising

Many appraisal reports include a long list of indicators. Yet often little thought is given to the practical implications of gathering the required information, not to mention how it will be used to manage for impact. During start-up, a critical task for all implementing partners is to assess what information can realistically be collected, given available human and financial resources.

For each information need or indicator, you must establish how the information will be collected and organised. For example, monitoring progress on irrigation infrastructure development may require that primary stakeholders and project staff check what infrastructure has actually been constructed and if it is working properly. This is relatively straightforward. However, monitoring the impact of the irrigation development – for example, in terms of changes in household income – requires a different method. One method you could consider is household surveys. This is a fairly time-consuming and expensive monitoring activity and one that does not make primary stakeholder participation easy. A different option might be village-led surveys and open discussions with impact flow diagrams (see Annex D) about how daily life has changed as a result of irrigation. Another example might be monitoring the implementation of an experimental microenterprise development fund. For this, you might choose to hold regular meetings or workshops with the implementing partners and entrepreneurs.

Not only will each indicator require choosing a different method, but for each indicator or information need you will usually present several options. Annex D describes many monitoring and information gathering methods – qualitative and quantitative and individual versus group-based. They range from simple record-keeping forms to agronomic assessments of yield changes, household surveys and participatory workshops. For example, instead of a detailed and extensive household survey on child immunisation, you could hold a focus group meeting with mothers to discuss the extent of immunisation, opinions on how this service is being provided, etc. Each method has specific advantages and disadvantages in terms of cost, reliability of data, skill needed, ability to quantify results and richness of information generated.

Particularly critical at the moment of method selection is knowing who will be involved in collecting, compiling and analysing. The more that the intended users of the methods can be involved in selecting or developing the methods, the more chance there is that they will understand them and use them correctly. If methods are selected by someone not using them, then training users in the methods will be essential.

Gathering data is one thing. But each bit of information also needs to be collated, perhaps summarised and certainly analysed by the right people. This will need to be planned in detail at start-up. Project field staff are often only involved as data collectors and primary stakeholders only as data providers. Seeing monitoring as a learning process implies that analysis and agreeing on actions are undertaken with all levels in the project hierarchy and with partners. As a general rule, data collection and analysis should be undertaken with those to
whom the data, analysis and decisions pertain and, therefore, at the relevant level. Field staff would, for example, need to understand about project reach within the administrative division for which they are responsible, while the project director needs to analyse project reach for the entire project area.

See Section 6 for practical aspects of information gathering and management.

4.2.4 Critical Reflection Processes and Events

How can people be involved in making sense of the data generated by M&E processes and in assessing the implications for the project strategy and operations? This aspect of M&E receives no attention in the logframe matrix and is rarely given the attention it needs during project design.

The M&E section in the appraisal report may have outlined the main critical reflection processes and events. But this is rare. Usually during start-up, you need to plan such processes in detail (what will be the focus, who will participate, will they be facilitated or self-managed, how will one process feed into others, etc.) and schedule when they will occur (see Table 4-2). Section 8 deals with critical reflection in detail. Figure 2-3 in Section 2 shows some common reflection events that occur during the life of most projects and how they complement each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-2. Example of Critical Reflection Schedule for a project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Reflection Processes or Events</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose and Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whom to Involve</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory review of project strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update the situation analysis, revise problems/visions, adjust objective hierarchy and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of intended primary stakeholders, staff of participant organisation, all project staff, facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-day workshop at start-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of M&amp;E plan with stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess different information needs, take stock of who is already doing what, agree on priority information areas, refine questions/indicators, decide on methods, agree on responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of intended primary stakeholders, staff of participant organisation, all project staff, facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four or five full-day meetings during the first six months of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly progress reviews by PMU staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of key successes and problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior staff of PMU and partner organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-day meeting every three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firsthand look at what is happening in the field, informal chats about how activities are being implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field staff, supervisors of field staff, project director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly visit for field staff, monthly for the project director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual project review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of key successes and problems, ideas for changing project activities/outputs and assumptions, review of implications for the project logframe, identification of lessons learned about project implementation, M&amp;E system adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of intended primary stakeholders, staff of implementing partners, all project staff, facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic review workshops of key project components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused discussion about the strategy and operations of key components to adjust the objective hierarchy, solve problems and identify lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stakeholders of the project component: intended primary stakeholders, implementing partners, field and senior project staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year in the first two years; after that, once every two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for supervision missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain the mission purpose, agree on what the project and stakeholders would like to get out of the mission, identify who needs to prepare what before the mission, organize the logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group of primary stakeholder representatives, senior staff of the participant organisation, senior project staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One month prior to the supervision mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical reflection can occur formally and informally. Formally, it can be facilitated during project meetings, workshops with partners and primary stakeholders or as part of external evaluations. Informally, it can occur in ongoing discussions between project stakeholders. There are endless examples of how reflection can be encouraged. For example, in Cuchumatanes, Guatemala, individual learning was encouraged by having core M&E staff participate in ongoing field activities. This gave them a clearer understanding of project operations: the relationships and how primary stakeholder generally accept and view operations. In Tropisec, Nicaragua, the extension agent of the implementing partner meets up with grassroots organisations to analyse current progress and results and to identify possible actions and resource requirements for the coming period. As part of their annual work programme within the project, all technical project staff are expected to share at least one significant learning experience with colleagues.

4.2.5 Communication and Reporting

The appraisal report will usually specify the expected reporting schedule, indicating who should receive a report and when. Often these will be reports for the funding agencies for accountability reasons. However, you also need to communicate M&E findings to many other stakeholders and for different reasons. For example, implications for policy must be shared with government officials, use of funds can be shared with partners and primary stakeholders, and documented lessons learned about the project strategy should be distributed to other projects.

During start-up, develop a detailed idea of your communication strategy. Include not only formal reports but also communication efforts that seek feedback about interim findings, and discuss what actions are needed.

- With representatives of all key stakeholders, develop a precise list of all the audiences, what information they need, when they need it and in which format.
- Spend some time discussing why each of these audiences needs information. To seek feedback for verification? As input for discussions of the implications for project strategy and operations? To clarify their responsibilities? For accountability? To influence and gain more support for field activities?
- Schedule clearly the production of information needs, showing who is to do what by when in order to have the information ready on time.
- Organise the events during which the information is to be communicated and discussed.

Section 6 discusses principles of communication and ways to seek feedback. Annex D includes methods you might find helpful to facilitate communication.

4.2.6 Necessary Conditions and Capacities

In the appraisal report, you will find an indicative budget for M&E and a description of how M&E should or could be organised. But getting the M&E system working also means thinking of appropriate incentives, ensuring you have the right and enough human capacity at hand, and thinking about ways of storing and sharing information. The necessary conditions and capacities for the M&E system to function were introduced in Section 2. They are dealt with in detail in Section 7. Table 4-3 lists key questions that need answers when detailing M&E to make it operational.

Discuss appropriate organisational structures for M&E at start-up. This is critical to the success – or failure – of M&E. It is the moment when negotiations need to reach decisions about each of the partners' responsibilities and information requirements.
IFAD-supported projects often have one of two basic organisational arrangements for M&E:

1. M&E is coordinated by an M&E coordinator or unit within the project management unit (and supplemented by external M&E contracts) to facilitate management’s quick use of information;

2. M&E is carried out by a separate M&E group – for example, subcontracted to a research institute or located within a government department – aiming to provide more objectivity and independent analysis.

Overall, experiences from many projects suggest that M&E is much more effective when those implementing M&E are part of project operations and decision-makers. This can be supplemented in important ways by more external M&E support. And other innovations are emerging that place M&E firmly in the hands of primary stakeholders or field teams (see Box 4-6).

Table 4-3. Questions to guide the detailed planning of M&E conditions and capacities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions and Capacities</th>
<th>Questions to Guide Detailed Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human capacity for M&amp;E</td>
<td>• What are the existing M&amp;E capacities with project partners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What training will be necessary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What consultancy support will be required?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives for implementing M&amp;E</td>
<td>• Are M&amp;E responsibilities included in job descriptions and terms of reference?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How will reflection and learning among staff, partners and the intended primary stakeholders be encouraged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational structures</td>
<td>• Will there be an M&amp;E unit or will M&amp;E be spread among all parties? If there is a unit, how many people will it have and where will it be located, under whose authority?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How closely connected will M&amp;E staff be with project management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management information systems (MIS)</td>
<td>• What information must be stored and accessible, when, how and for whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What level of computerisation is required and appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What expertise will be required to set up the information management system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial resources</td>
<td>• Is there a separate M&amp;E budget and have sufficient resources been allocated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has the staffing allocation for the project taken into account time for all relevant staff to undertake M&amp;E activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 4-6. Participatory M&E generates attitude and culture of self-evaluation and empowerment in community-based organisations

The participatory evaluation method used by one of the implementing agencies in Prochalate, El Salvador, focuses on generating an attitude and culture of self-evaluation and the empowerment of the community-based organisation (CBO) field teams. With this system, it is possible to avoid preconceptions and vested opinions while reinforcing the idea of evaluation for improvement instead of for judgement. The approach has four steps: self-evaluation, cross-evaluation in the field, plenary workshop (with the two teams together) and a final summing-up.

• During the self-evaluation, each team evaluates its working plan at the middle and end of the year, looking at i) the proposed objectives, ii) the reached and unachieved objectives, and iii) improvements needed.

• The cross-evaluation consists of a team in the field facilitating the participatory evaluation of another team. This implies field visits to observe technical aspects, as well as a review workshop. Workshops are carried out with the primary stakeholders of another team to evaluate the quality of work done by the implementing agency, rather than focusing on the extension agents. This facilitates and guarantees the neutrality and freedom of the stakeholders when giving their opinions. It also avoids intimidation due to the presence of the extension agent. This generates a professional ethic and encourages constructive criticism.

• In the plenary workshop, each team presents its own evaluation and the evaluation made by the other team.

• The process ends with a final summing-up in which the results of the self-evaluation workshop are compared with the results found by the other team.
Once most of the detailed M&E plan has been completed, you can take a fresh look at the M&E budget. Box 4-7 provides a list of likely M&E costs. How you cost M&E depends on whether you allocate resources to specific M&E activities or whether you include M&E in generic categories, such as “staff training”, “participatory workshops”, etc. Details on budgeting for M&E are discussed in Section 7.

Box 4-7. Possible M&E costs to consider in the budget (see Section 7 for more details)

- Staff time, such as: planning, implementing and improving all the M&E processes; report writing and analysis; capturing and documenting lessons learned; facilitating community-based M&E processes
- Consultants/Technical assistance (fees, travel expenses), such as: developing a detailed M&E plan; establishing management information systems; facilitating review workshops, training and capacity-building; checking of audits
- Evaluation events (venue costs, travel and accommodation, materials, per diems, course fees), such as: M&E planning workshops, annual community review workshops, specific monitoring activities, focused evaluations on important topics
- Materials and equipment, such as: technical equipment for monitoring; computer and network hardware and software; dial-up networking charges; network maintenance contract
- Publication and documentation, such as: printing documents and distribution; display boards; materials

4.3 Documenting the M&E Plan

Projects have three core documents that serve to guide M&E:

1. The M&E framework in the project appraisal report (see Section 3 and Section 4.2, Table 4-1, for a discussion);
2. The project implementation manual;
3. The M&E plan or manual.

4.3.1 M&E in the Project Implementation Manual

Most projects allocate time and resources to develop what is known as a “project implementation (or procedures) manual”. This is a set of guidelines with information about financial accounting procedures, procurement procedures, guidelines for staff travel, guidelines for the use of vehicles and other equipment, and other details necessary for the smooth operation of the project.

The detailed M&E plan may be part of the project implementation manual, an annex to it or a separate document. Irrespective of where it can be found, the implementation guidelines and M&E guidelines must be closely linked and, above all, coordinated. Contradictions or ambiguities in the two sets of guidelines must be avoided.

As the detailed M&E plans may contain an overwhelming degree of detail, summaries for all project participants are helpful to keep everyone focused on their responsibilities. A good way to summarise specific inputs is in an M&E timeline for everyone who plays an important M&E role (see Box 4-8). Ideally, these timelines should be integrated within weekly and monthly activity timelines so that M&E becomes an integrated part of activities.
Box 4-8. Working with an M&E timeline

Knowing when information is needed is critical. By the time you have reached this point of specifying the M&E plan, you may find it hard to remember all the key M&E moments and how they relate to each other and to planning.

An M&E timeline is a useful tool for maintaining an overview of the various internal activities scheduled, key reporting moments and external missions. One simple aid for coordinating M&E activities is to hang a copy of the timeline in a central meeting room and ask each team member to make a personalised version in which his/her responsibilities are outlined over the year.

Example 1. One project in Zimbabwe records M&E milestones in a calendar like the one below. This project also had a separate monitoring calendar on institutional process that indicated when reports had to be sent to whom and on what topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTRACT FROM: Calendar on outcome and impact monitoring and assessment (annual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1, 3-4th quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2, 1st and 2nd quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2, 3rd and 4th quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2. A project in Nepal plans to use a CEA, a critical events agenda, which lists the most critical project milestones to be monitored. It is to be discussed in annual stakeholder workshops and included in all annual reports. It will be updated regularly. It looks like the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Critical Event</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Status/Causes of Delays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same project also outlined its indicative monitoring and evaluation plan in the appraisal report in terms of what each M&E report and activity was contributing towards the six main M&E objectives it had set (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Report and Records</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Periodic</td>
<td>Progress Monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact Monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tracking of Broader Context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trend Analysis and Forecasting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-periodic</td>
<td>19 different entries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 entries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Indicative Contents for an M&E Plan

A documented plan is critical for keeping track of activities and resources. The operational plan for project M&E provides the conceptual and, above all, practical basis for planning, monitoring and evaluation within the project. In Cuchumatanes, Guatemala, the M&E document described: its objectives, strategies, methodologies, work plan, its activities in detail and the technical tools to be used. The document also defined the main concepts related to M&E, the redesigned logframe matrix, the adjustment of information collection systems and the database of primary stakeholders.

The M&E operational plan will be the reference point for stakeholders throughout the project life. So it needs to be comprehensive enough, at the macro level, to provide a clear picture of the overall project intentions and how the M&E system will serve this. At the micro level, it must give fine detail on schedules, responsibilities, budgets and so on, which will help guide the drawing-up of AWPBs. Where monitoring tasks are implemented with local stakeholders, such details may have to be translated into local languages.

Table 4-4. Indicative contents for an M&E operational plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose and scope</strong></td>
<td>• Project overview and objectives, rationale and justification for the design of the M&amp;E system&lt;br&gt;• How the M&amp;E system will support project management and meet the reporting requirements and information needs of different stakeholders&lt;br&gt;• Summary of overall experience of M&amp;E undertaken with key stakeholders&lt;br&gt;• Discussion of extent of participation, balance between qualitative/quantitative approach, resource intensity and the intended poverty focus of the M&amp;E system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>Overview of how stakeholders will be involved, what learning-oriented approaches will be used and, in general terms, what information gathering and analysing methods will be used; for example, the extent of use of participatory approaches, geographic information systems, computer-based information systems or baselines surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revised logical framework, plus performance questions, indicators, information needs and sources</strong></td>
<td>Precise definition of all performance questions, indicators and information needs for all levels of the objective hierarchy;&lt;br&gt;• Assessment of the information needs and interests of all key stakeholders&lt;br&gt;• Assessment of indicators of exogenous factors and assumptions (e.g., climate, prices, outbreak of pests and disease, economic situation, policy environment)&lt;br&gt;• Assessment of information needs and indicators for relevance and end-use and for technical and resource feasibility&lt;br&gt;• Selection of performance questions and indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management information system and reporting</strong></td>
<td>• Purpose of the management information system&lt;br&gt;• Organisation of information gathering and synthesis:&lt;br&gt;  - For each expected information product – who, what, when and where&lt;br&gt;  - Schedule of information production – who, what, when, to whom, for what purpose&lt;br&gt;  - How computerised networks and manual archiving systems are expected to function, with/to whom, for which data&lt;br&gt;  - Outline of data storage needs&lt;br&gt;• Expected reporting outputs, for example:&lt;br&gt;  - Informal communication and feedback channels&lt;br&gt;  - Report flows – deadlines and frequencies&lt;br&gt;  - AWPBs - outline of the AW PB format, including output/activity plans and budgets, consolidated budgets, a training plan, a procurement plan, a contracted services plan&lt;br&gt;  - (Bi-)Annual progress reports for the project as a whole and each component, village-based reviews&lt;br&gt;  - (Bi-)Annual financial reports&lt;br&gt;  - Recurrent supervision missions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Precise definition of methods to be used with different stakeholder groups for two core purposes:

1. M&E of resources, activities and implementation for effective project operations:
   - Project resources: transport use, allowances, register of assets, register of services/technical assistance
   - Project activities: training (workshops, study tours, etc.), construction (technical or social infrastructure), scheme organisation, trials and demonstrations, credit lines, etc.
   - Other monitoring activities

2. M&E of outcomes and impact for guiding the project strategy, for example:
   - Proposed surveys: baseline/household, component, staff
   - Participatory annual assessment and planning workshops
   - Other annual evaluation and beneficiary assessments, reviews and planning sessions
   - Mid-term review and project completion report
   - Feasibility of methods in terms of technology and resources
   - M&E work plan schedule: integrated schedule of key events and reporting/decision-making moments
   - Critical events agenda

M&E organisation:
- Necessary institutional and stakeholder linkages for M&E
- Existence (or not) of a specific M&E unit and how it relates to the project structure and hierarchy of authority

Human resource needs:
- Number, capacities and responsibilities of different stakeholders in M&E, including project staff and primary stakeholders
- Incentives for different stakeholders
- Training needs of stakeholders and staff

Resource needs:
- Vehicles and equipment
- Technical assistance

Detailed budget allocation
- Original and revised logframes
- List of proposed indicators
- Outline formats for data collection, annual and biannual schedule of activities, etc.
- Outline formats for preparing: quarterly, biannual and annual reports; a summary of main project achievements; status reports on project inputs and resources, project outputs and results; evaluation studies - summary of findings and recommendations
- Baseline survey questionnaire
- Staff job descriptions and details of allowances
- Technical Assistance terms of reference
- M&E work plan
- Detailed budget of M&E
4.4 Quality of your M&E and Keeping It Updated

Once you have a detailed M&E system, two more steps are needed. First, you need to check the overall quality of the system itself, as designed. Second, you need to keep updating it to accommodate changing information needs, skill levels and contexts as well as the refinements in project strategies and activities. Box 4-9 shows why and how one project revised its M&E functions.

The standard criteria for assessing the quality of your M&E system are:

- **Utility** – the M&E system will serve the practical information needs of intended users;
- **Feasibility** – the methods, sequences, timing and processing procedures proposed are realistic, prudent and cost effective;
- **Propriety** – the M&E activities will be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard for the welfare of those affected by its results;
- **Accuracy** – the M&E outputs will reveal and convey technically adequate information.

These criteria can also be used when updating the M&E system.

**Box 4-9. Assuring quality in M&E**

To standardise M&E information in Cuchumatanes, Guatemala, the project – with the implementing agencies – developed formatting outlines and rules about registering and using information. This was critical to be able to analyse project actions using information that had been collected and analysed by diverse actors at various levels applying a variety of methods and through different intervention models.

The project management of the ADIP project in Bangladesh regularly reviewed and evaluated the performance of different monitoring methods and tried to correct the problems and remove bottlenecks. Further, they continually updated M&E plans. For example, four years after project start-up, their plans were:

- Further computerisation of the routine monitoring activities;
- Increase field-level monitoring (by standard data collection) after organising new M&E technical assistance staff;
- Gradually increase emphasis given to participatory types of M&E.

Just as the project requires continual adaptation, the M&E system will also need to be adjusted regularly and improved as the project evolves and experience develops (see Box 4-10). The WUPAP programme in Nepal recognised this in its project appraisal report: "Keeping in view the demand-driven approach of the programme and flexibility embedded in the implementation arrangements, the M&E and MIS approach will also be flexible ... in that it will respond to emerging requirements for the feedback and information of users by redesigning its outputs as the vision of the stakeholders broadens."
Box 4-10. Revising M&E in Guatemala

Four years after start-up, the project team in Cuchumatanes, Guatemala, analysed both the M&E expectations laid out in the appraisal report and the information needs at different stages of management and project execution. Results showed that the M&E activities were not very effective for:

- decision-making at management levels;
- determining component progress and achievements;
- analysing the changes that have occurred among the primary stakeholders as a result of project intervention;
- determining the appropriateness of the institutional mechanisms undertaken.

This had led to much information being produced and yet not being used for project planning and for sharing with others.

The project decided to reorganise and redirect the M&E unit, reformulate the M&E work plan and renew the M&E team itself. The main purpose became “to guarantee that the actions and work strategy of the M&E unit contribute to the achievement of expected project outcomes”. A new M&E system was designed specifically to:

- reinforce the management capacity of the PMU;
- strengthen local stakeholder capacity for M&E;
- ensure the documentation, organisation, dissemination and use of project experiences.

One outcome would be to generate a process of permanent reflection and communication about: project focus, appropriateness of the intervention strategy and progress with implementation and the accomplishment of objectives. Another would be to contribute to a better ordering and use of information.” It was also expected to build up and/or reinforce local capacities for sustainable M&E among different actors and circumstances involved in project management and execution.

Discussions among key stakeholders are critical to point out weak areas of a project’s M&E system. In the APPTDP project in India, discussions with state-level project authorities brought up the need for a process to be able to document changes from village to village and for resources to be available to meet changing priorities. They also wanted support to synthesise lessons and document project impacts. In addition, they suggested reviewing and modifying progress-monitoring formats to provide room for recording qualitative information, besides quantitative information. Finally, they suggested reviewing formats to remove information gathering of data that has not been useful over the last ten years of implementation.

Updating not only needs to happen with the project-based M&E systems and procedures. The learning processes of other stakeholder groups also need regular updating (see Box 4-11).

Box 4-11. Self-evaluation means that indicators change over time

In one project in India, the self-evaluation of the self-help groups had become a mundane process and needed to be reviewed. The indicators needed to change, as groups were maturing and achieving stability in terms of, for example, attendance and making deposits. The original indicators were no longer so critical. More pertinent issues such as “increase in loans from banks rather than only internal borrowing” would be a potential new indicator that would reflect the evolution of the local self-help groups.
Further Reading

Three useful Websites on monitoring and evaluation (in English):

- News service, discussion lists, key readings, projects, courses and workshops on M&E: http://www.mande.co.uk
- A quick search for PME provides links to online documentation as well as document lists and discussions on M&E: http://www.ids.ac.uk/eldis
- Online links to participatory M&E: http://www.worldbank.org/participation/partme.htm (or look under Operations Evaluation Department (OED) under the general Website)


List of Booklets in the Guide

| Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide | Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms |
| Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact | Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3) |
| Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E | Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5) |
| Section 4. Setting up the M&E System | Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8) |
| Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate | Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7) |
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Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
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Key Messages

- Identifying what information is needed for what purposes and by whom is critical to successful M&E.
- To be able to manage for impact, an M&E system needs to track progress in relation to targets. It also needs to explain success and failure, plus identify unintended positive or negative effects.
- You will need information that helps answer five types of questions: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of project efforts. Do not forget to track information that will help you know if the project strengthens gender equality and optimally benefits marginal groups.
- Try to only collect information that is actively used. Avoid the common M&E trap of gathering too much data of limited quality and not analysing it. Less data may lead to more useful information.
- Use the six steps to complete the M&E matrix that can give you sufficient detail to implement your M&E plan.
- Baselines – or alternatives to these – need special consideration, as they make it possible to see change.
- As the project evolves, you will need to review your information needs and indicators. Include new information needs and delete those that are no longer relevant.

This Section is useful for:

- Managers – to help supervise the development of the M&E system;
- M&E staff – to guide project implementers in: establishing performance questions to guide data analysis, agreeing what to monitor and evaluate, and specifying who must do what and when if the information system is to function well;
- Consultants – to support M&E staff in developing appropriate monitoring mechanisms and when reviewing and updating the M&E system.
5.1 An Overview of Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate

Have you ever had the experience of going full speed ahead and then realising you are heading in the wrong direction? This is what happened to a cooperative in Chile and was a result of tracking the wrong information 1.

Despite several years of hard work, by December 1998, the cooperative found itself unable to repay one of its loans. The cooperative had become top-heavy, with revenue unable to cover its operational and non-operational expenses. It had 11 paid employees when only 100 hectares of vegetables were being grown.

Since 1994, the cooperative had been able to organise many small farmers with little external support. It had strong leadership, a sound understanding of marketing constraints and a clear vision of how to overcome them. The cooperative was trusted by all parties, including INDAP – the national agricultural development institute – and expanded rapidly due to larger loans and more grants. The results of the earliest investments were considered sufficient proof that this cooperative could make it, and analysis of future prospects became increasingly relaxed.

Monitoring was reduced to tracking physical outputs: a larger warehouse, irrigation systems installed on members’ farms, more trucks, more production, etc. Little attention was given to the economic and financial results of these investments, even less to their sustainability. “We never had a method for monitoring this process, we were following the wrong indicators, we did not ask the correct questions and were far too short-sighted,” says an INDAP staff member, adding, “In my opinion, the same happened at the cooperative.” Another external advisor familiar with the process remarked, “There were two blind persons [INDAP and the cooperative] driving a very fast car.”

To get to where you want to go, you need to know what information to seek to guide the journey. If you don’t ask the right questions, you will not get useful answers. But the choice of what to ask is vast. How do you know what to choose – and whom to involve in the process? How can you balance impact-level insights with tracking operational expenditure? When it comes to detailing precisely what will be tracked, documented and analysed, many choices have to be made by project stakeholders.

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5.1.1 Keeping in Mind Different Information Needs

When deciding what information to monitor and evaluate, keep the following in mind:

1. Seek the information needs of different stakeholders - with them. Do not consider only project management information needs.
2. Be sure to include information that can help you answer the five core evaluation questions: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.
3. Include information that can help you understand how well the project is dealing with cross-cutting issues such as the quality of participation, gender-balanced impacts and reaching the poorest.
4. Remember to include information for each level of the objective hierarchy: goal, purpose, objectives and activities. This will help you answer the five types of evaluation questions (see point 2).
5. Include enough operational information to know if you are making optimal use of resources and that operations are good quality.
6. Seek information that can help you not only to check targets but, especially, to explain progress. Only by knowing why something is happening or why not, do you have a basis for deciding what corrective action is needed.
7. Look out for the unintended. Tracking information related to the objective hierarchy will only keep you up to date on what you intend to achieve. Seek out unintended positive and negative impacts in order to take any corrective action that might be necessary.
8. Last but not least, stick to the “less-is-more” principle. Only include a piece of information if someone in the project clearly uses it to improve impact. Regularly revise your list of information needs to filter out the information that does not seem to be critical to manage for impact.

5.1.2 The Value of the M&E Matrix

The logical framework approach (LFA) that all IFAD-supported projects need to follow does not provide much detailed guidance on what information is useful to track. The standard logframe matrix provides insufficient space for detailed M&E comments. Only two columns are suggested in which to summarise M&E: a column for “indicators” and one for “means of verification” (see Section 4). This is not enough to be able to implement M&E.

To make M&E operational you need much more detail. This can be summarised in the “M&E matrix” (see 5.3), which contains the following information:

- performance questions;
- information needs and indicators;
- baseline information requirements, status and responsibilities;
- data-gathering methods, frequency and responsibilities;
- required forms, planning, training, data management, expertise, resources and responsibilities;
- analysis, reporting, feedback and change processes and responsibilities.
Looking at the matrix you might well wonder about the need for all this detail. A rule of thumb is “if everyone knows what they need to do when, why and for whom, then you have enough detail”. Until then, keep detailing with the appropriate people.

Developing the M&E matrix after project start-up involves six steps:

1. Identify performance questions.
2. Identify information needs and indicators.
3. Know what baseline information you need.
4. Select which data-gathering methods to use, by whom and how often.
5. Identify the necessary practical support for information gathering.
6. Organise analysis, feedback and change.

The rest of this section details how to work with the M&E matrix. Annex C provides an example of the M&E matrix, which is based on the logframe example in Annex B.

### 5.1.3 Performance Questions and Indicators

It is common practice to jump straight from having refined the objectives in the logframe matrix to detailing the indicators. This causes a series of problems as people drown in detail before agreeing on why the indicators they suggest might be of interest and how they could support decision-making.

Identifying performance questions for each level of the objective hierarchy (see point 2, 5.1.2 above), before detailing indicators, helps you focus your information-gathering on what will truly advance understanding and improve project performance. Performance questions are very useful for projects that are trying to innovate the how to of development. For example, the MARENASS project in Peru disburses all funding through farmer competitions, while the FODESA project in Mali sub-contracts all activities. They need to learn how to do this well so must monitor the quality of the process – not just whether targets are hit.

With performance questions, you can start identifying what information you need. This can include indicators and, possibly, additional background information that allows you to interpret the data from the indicators. Indicators will only ever show a partial view. They represent a simplification or approximation of a situation. An indicator simply helps communicate changes that are usually more complex. Using an indicator often means reducing data to the symbolic representation of a project objective, in a way that is relevant and significant for the people who will use the information.

Almost any topic that needs to be monitored can be assessed using either quantitative or qualitative indicators, according to the kind of information you need. Many indicators use adjectives. Common adjectives in indicators are: successful, adequate, equitable, good, effective, participatory, empowered and well functioning. When using adjectives in indicators, make sure everyone involved agrees on what they mean.

When working with indicators to assess impact, you are trying to create an overall picture built up of various aspects. A typical project will want to know its impact on “quality of life” or “poverty alleviation”. Yet each project component makes a unique contribution: health activities reduced morbidity/mortality, agricultural development helped increase yields and incomes, functional literacy built self-esteem, etc. So one indicator or even several will not be adequate to understand the changes. For impact assessments, a descriptive analysis rather than single indicators often better capture the overall changes.
5.1.4 Comparing to See Change

One of the first concrete tasks that you, as project director or M&E unit coordinator, are likely to face is establishing baselines. To see change, you will need to make a comparison. A baseline serves as a point of comparison. You have three options, each with their advantages and disadvantages (see 5.6):

1. Compare the situation “before the project started” of, for example, a community, household or organisation with the situation “after it started”.

2. Track changes with and without a project presence, which means comparing changes inside the project area with those in similar locations outside the project area.

3. Compare the difference between similar groups – one that has been working with the project and a so-called control group that is not within project influence.

Three alternatives are: (1) using the first measurement as the starting point, even if it is after your intervention has started; (2) using a rolling baseline wherein you collect information of a site or group only when you start working there or with them; and (3) making optimal use of existing documentation to develop an overview of the situation.

5.1.5 Updating Your Information Needs and Indicators

The sign of a healthy M&E system is that it evolves over time. As the project evolves, activities will change, groups will evolve, and the understanding of what information is useful will grow. Plan regular revision of the list of information needs and indicators.

5.2 Knowing What You Need to Know

5.2.1 Information for – and with - Different Stakeholders

To decide what you need to know, first make an effort to understand the information needs of different stakeholders (see Box 5-1). This requires analysis with the stakeholders of the information they need, either by asking them to develop their own list of information needs or by checking a suggested list with them. Stakeholders are likely to choose to focus their M&E requirements on their areas of specific interest (see Table 5-1). Including different stakeholders in identifying what information to track will also increase the likelihood that the information will be used.

Box 5-1. Knowing who needs to know - and do - what in Bangladesh

The core team of the ADIP project (Bangladesh) recommended working with various stakeholders (target primary stakeholders, NGOs and their group facilitators, government staff, etc.) to monitor impact according to their specific interests, as follows: “Target groups should be encouraged to observe and document changes in self-employment, production and income, and improvements of their living conditions in terms of food security, child education, water and sanitation, assets and housing. The NGO group facilitators should be enabled to monitor group development, gender relations and the advancement of group members’ individual capacities (literacy, bookkeeping, etc.). Field extension officers should be trained in applying simple methods to monitor changes in knowledge and skills, adoption of new agricultural and horticultural management techniques, and diversification and intensification of production.”
List all key stakeholders and organise meetings with them to define their information needs (see Box 5-2). Be aware that not all information needs can be anticipated ahead of time. As the project evolves and stakeholders develop their visions for and understanding of the project, information needs will have to be adjusted (see 5.7).

The project M&E unit may need to coordinate the information flows to ensure that pieces of information complement (and do not duplicate) each other and to organise everyone’s access to each other’s data and analysis. See Section 6 for more on developing an M&E communication strategy.

Box 5-2. Compiling ideas before deciding on indicators in Zimbabwe

In an irrigation project in Zimbabwe, when the logframe was being revised, an initial set of indicators had been collected by project staff and consultants through visits to irrigation schemes and discussions with male and female farmers, district officials and extension workers. To refine this set, two 1.5 day workshops were held with about 40 participants each. First, participants learned about the concept and purpose of monitoring in the project. Project outputs and collected indicators were presented. The scheme-specific indicators were refined with the farmers. The institutional indicators were refined through discussions with project management. Institutional linkages and roles/responsibilities of monitoring at the scheme, district and national levels were also discussed.

5.2.2. M&E for Different Levels in the Objective Hierarchy

Start by identifying your information needs in relation to the objective hierarchy. Each level of the objective hierarchy (goal, purpose, output and activity) has unique performance questions and therefore its own information needs. In general, as you move from activities up to goal in the objective hierarchy, M&E becomes less straightforward (see Table 5-2). For example, at the activity and output levels, you can quite easily track which activities have been completed and their direct outputs. This is operational information. However, it is more difficult to identify the outcomes of the outputs together.

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At the impact level, assessing the extent to which a project has reduced poverty and improved people’s livelihoods requires careful thought about the performance questions and indicators that will be appropriate. In general, as you move up the objective hierarchy, you will probably find it necessary to integrate qualitative and quantitative information, relying less on single quantitative indicators to make sense of progress.

Table 5-2. Shifting information needs in the objective hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level in Objective Hierarchy</th>
<th>What to Monitor and Evaluate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Have planned activities been completed on time and within budget? What unplanned activities have been completed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>What direct tangible products or services has the project delivered as a result of activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key outcomes/components</td>
<td>What changes have occurred as a result of the outputs and to what extent are these likely to contribute towards the project purpose and desired impact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Over its life, overall, has the project achieved the changes for which it can realistically be held accountable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>To what extent has the project contributed towards its longer-term goals? Why or why not? What unanticipated positive or negative consequences did the project have? Why did they arise?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3 The Five Key Questions

After you identify what basic information you will require to gauge whether you are proceeding according to plan, you might have to add more information needs. You must ensure that you can answer the five standard types of evaluation questions (see 2.1), referred to here as “the five key questions”:

1. Relevance – Was/Is the project a good idea given the situation needing improvement? Does it deal with target group priorities? Why or why not?
2. Effectiveness – Have the planned purpose and component objectives, outputs and activities been achieved? Why or why not? Is the intervention logic correct? Why or why not?
3. Efficiency – Were inputs (resources and time) used in the best possible way to achieve outcomes? Why or why not? What could we do differently to improve implementation, thereby maximising impact, at an acceptable and sustainable cost?
4. Impact – To what extent has the project contributed towards its longer-term goals? Why or why not? What unanticipated positive or negative consequences did the project have? Why did they arise? To what extent has the project contributed towards poverty reduction (or other long-term goals)? Why or why not? What unanticipated positive or negative consequences did the project have? Why did they arise?
5. Sustainability – Will there be continued positive impacts as a result of the project once it has finished? Why or why not?

The M&E of operations will focus on the questions of “effectiveness” and “efficiency”. More strategic reflections, like during annual reviews and supervision missions, will look at the questions of “relevance”, “impact” and “sustainability”. Some projects are also asked to prove their cost-effectiveness (see Box 5-3).
Box 5-3. Understanding cost-effectiveness

Increasingly, projects are asked to prove their cost-effectiveness. This means showing how much they spend per “product” or per “service”. For example, per person who attends the new health clinic, how much has the project spent for staff time, training, kilometres of transport and construction materials? This can be calculated by comparing the real costs of the project to the original estimated costs. Another more common version is to calculate unit costs and compare these to such costs in other, similar projects. Cost-effectiveness analysis should lead to the greatest benefits at the lowest possible cost-per-unit for each benefit – however benefit might be defined.

However, in practice, this type of calculation is difficult when working on less tangible issues such as local organisation strengthening, increased women’s awareness, stronger democracy, etc. It is not as easy to count one unit of “extra democracy” as it is to count increased clinic attendance. Also, what is considered the “effective” use of resources in one context may be considered a waste in another.

5.2.4 Keeping an Eye on Cross-Cutting Concerns

Many IFAD-supported projects strive towards encouraging gender equality hand in hand with poverty reduction. Knowing how well you are doing on the gender-equality scale will require an M&E system that tracks gender-disaggregated differences. Without this, a project will find it very difficult to prove its effectiveness for any gender-sensitive objectives such as “increased purchasing power” or “increased access to land”. Indicators will need to be formulated that enable gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis. Different aspects of the baseline and interim thematic studies also need to be gender sensitive.

In a Zimbabwe project, during workshops for preparing the monitoring system, there was strong debate among participants about how to include a gender-sensitive perspective. Gender concerns are crucial for a successful project, as gender imbalances persist in terms of plot-holding, division of labour, access to profit, etc. Yet gender issues had not been spelled out in project objectives. Focusing on gender when monitoring change allowed it to appear as a cross-cutting concern.

Your specific gender-related information needs will relate to your objectives, so the following examples are only to provide inspiration:

- incidence of stunting among boys and girls;
- number and type of households participating in micro-credit related income-generating activities, with special consideration of female-headed households from poor and very poor households;
- the number and gender of out-of-school children and dropouts;
- number of male and female farmers affording basic food, increased from x% to y% of the target population by the end of the programme;
- number of diseases among women/men and girls/boys related to malnutrition, decreased from x to y by the end of the programme.

Other social differences that a project considers critical also need monitoring. For example, in Nepal, a project will be disaggregating data not only by gender, but also by caste and ethnic groups. This will help the implementing team determine whether the most vulnerable groups are benefiting.
5.2.5 Remembering Operational Information

Information for managing project operations is just as important for overall performance as information about achieving the project strategy. Operational information monitoring tends to be straightforward for most projects, partly because physical and financial monitoring involves simple counting. But as there is so much that can be counted, the trick is to limit this type of monitoring to the necessary. For the key areas of operational management, Table 5-3 lists the main management tasks and the information needs.

Table 5-3. Key areas of operational management, management tasks and information needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Management Area</th>
<th>Key Management Tasks</th>
<th>Information Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work planning and activity tracking</td>
<td>• Annual, quarterly and weekly activity planning</td>
<td>• Detailed activity, sub-activity and task lists for achievement of outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Allocation of resources to activities</td>
<td>• Lists of required resources per activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Checking progress on activities and responding to problems</td>
<td>• Activity and task progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>• Allocation of financial resources to activities and tasks</td>
<td>• General project financial-management information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring expenditure according to budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revising budgets as needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant, building and equipment management</td>
<td>• Purchasing and maintaining equipment</td>
<td>• Asset register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Allocating equipment</td>
<td>• Vehicle use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Equipment maintenance schedule, standards and responsibilities</td>
<td>• Equipment maintenance schedule, standards and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff management</td>
<td>• Developing and monitoring staff work plans</td>
<td>• Time use of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff performance appraisal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract management</td>
<td>• Developing contracts</td>
<td>• Copies of contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring delivery of contracts</td>
<td>• Dates of completion of contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Report on quality of contract fulfilment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.6 Tracking Quality and Context to Explain Progress

In Indonesia, project staff said, “We need to understand the link between physical progress monitoring and the benefits of physical outputs for the rural poor. For example, we don’t know what effect it has on the poor when the monitoring data shows that 50 of the 100 km of feeder roads have now been built. So we don’t know the benefits of our investments. With our current physical indicators, we cannot see the link between investment, activity, progress and benefit.”

To explain progress – and not just measure how much of something occurred – you can:

- monitor the quality of the implementation process;
- use qualitative methods that ask people about their opinions on the process;
- keep up-to-date on the operating environment.

As project director or M&E unit coordinator, you will probably find that keeping track of the use of inputs and of targets for activities and outputs is time consuming. Yet it is essential. Furthermore, the example of the Chilean cooperative, at the beginning of Section 5, shows that it is not enough. You will need to know why something is working well or not so you are able to provide strategic guidance and make appropriate adjustments. Simply knowing that
you have, for example, built 86% of the roads within the expected timeframe, does not tell you if these are of good quality, in the right place and impacting poverty, or whether capacities have been built to maintain them.

Let’s take a practical example to see how targets are linked with monitoring that explains progress. Many IFAD-supported projects intend to “build capacity” or “develop local institutions”. Common indicators for this are, for example, “number of small farmer groups formed” or “number of extension staff trained”. However, this tells you nothing about the quality of the work or about impact. You might have helped initiate 100 small farmer groups but find that six months after the first meeting, only 18 are still functioning. So you will need to monitor, for instance, the quality of the process through which these groups are set up so that, later, you are better able to make the adjustments needed to sustain the groups. Another example is if you want to assess impact. You would need to evaluate with group members how their membership in the group is improving their livelihoods (or not).

In practice, monitoring in order to be able to understand what the numbers mean requires the use of qualitative methods (see Section 6 and Annex D).

Keeping informed of the operating environment is also critical to interpret success or failure. Section 2.2.3 discusses ways to keep track of the project context. Those involved in the projects will update themselves through existing information sources and via their formal and informal networks. But updates can also be sub-contracted as pieces of research on key topics relevant to your project. You can also organise an annual seminar to which you invite specialists to provide an overview of trends. The issues you will need to track depend on the project focus. Common issues include: legislation, macro-economics (markets, prices), agricultural price policies and trends at the national/international level, poverty status, gender relations, the organisational landscape, demographic change and health trends.

5.2.7. Looking Out for the Unintended

Indicators are critical to projects. They represent information you know will interest you. And what about important information that we do not expect? In the Chile example, they did not think to look at the financial results of the new investments.

Some projects include in their annual, mid-term and completion evaluations the question of unintended positive and negative impacts that are not part of the objective hierarchy. This is a good M&E practice. Section 6 and Annex D describe some ways to assess unintended impacts.

You can also track the unexpected through more regular reflections. When deciding what to track, you cannot anticipate the unknown. But you can plan time to reflect on the unexpected. Ask yourself, “What happened with respect to this project activity/relationship/output/component that we did not expect?” To work through this, the project should address the questions:

- What happened since we last met that was unexpected?
- How was it different from what we expected?
- What are the implications of the unexpected for our work (e.g., for a specific activity, a relationship with another organisation or a specific project output)?
5.2.8 The Less-Is-More Principle

One of the most difficult tasks for projects is to monitor within their limits. Ministry staff involved in one project in Indonesia said, “In central Jakarta we only get data on a monthly basis from 30% of the groups. In the two provinces that perform the best, we receive data from 80% of the groups.” If the requirements were reduced (frequency, number of indicators and level of detail), the project might get a better response rate and be able to use its limited resources for more optimal monitoring.

Probably the biggest complaint of project M&E staff is that monitoring many indicators gets in the way of the “real” work of implementation. It is very important to reduce data collection to the minimum necessary to meet key management, learning and reporting needs. Trying to monitor too much can ruin the entire M&E system.

The PADEMER project in Colombia encountered many difficulties due to the numerous indicators suggested in the appraisal report. So, the monitoring unit facilitated a revision process for the indicators with the national technical coordination unit and the implementing NGOs. All agreed to continue using the key impact indicators as given in the appraisal report (“variation in incomes” and “generation of employment”). They then formulated indicators for the five project components: productive development, business management, markets and marketing, organisational development and financial services. They reduced over 100 indicators to 18 key ones that can demonstrate the changes the project stakeholders expect to deliver.

With those involved in detailing the operational M&E plan, screen all proposed indicators before agreeing to monitor them. For every indicator or piece of information that you or others are suggesting to monitor and evaluate, ask yourself, “Who needs to use this information, when and to do what exactly?” In a project in Indonesia, data on livestock, farm inputs, group details (e.g., savings, loans, training completed and technical progress made) and finance and administration information are recorded. Fieldworkers collect information from 13 different record books kept by each farmer group. Perhaps screening this project’s indicators for quality and end-use could make monitoring more useful and less of a burden.

When there is doubt about an indicator, seriously consider excluding it from your M&E plan – as tempting as it might be to think that someone may find it of interest. Including what is nice to know will only make your life difficult. Try to include only what you need to know.
5.3 Using the M&E Matrix for Detailed Planning

5.3.1 About the M&E Matrix

To make M&E operational you need much more detail, which can be summarised in the "M&E matrix" (see Table 5-4). The rest of this section and Sections 6 to 8 provide the details on how to deal with each column. Here we will briefly outline the M&E matrix, looking at each column in turn.

Table 5-4. Contents of the M&E matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Questions</th>
<th>Information Needs and Indicators</th>
<th>Baseline Information Requirements Status and Responsibilities</th>
<th>Data-Gathering Methods, Frequency and Responsibilities</th>
<th>Required Forms, Planning, Training, Data Management, Expertise, Resources and Responsibilities</th>
<th>Analysis, Reporting, Feedback and Change Processes, and Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE – Project Key Outcome 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE – Project Key Outcome 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2 Step 1. Identifying Performance Questions

Rather than starting with indicators, first identify performance questions. This helps you focus your information gathering on what you will really use for understanding and improving project performance. Identifying performance questions (indicators and selection methods) will be iterative: make an initial choice, assess its feasibility, accept and use it or reject it and find the next option. Step 1 is discussed in 5.4.

5.3.3 Step 2. Identifying Information Needs and Indicators

Using your performance questions, you can more easily identify useful indicators and other information needs for which you will need to collect data. Only data that help answer your performance questions are necessary. This helps avoid collecting information that is difficult to use to guide the project strategy and operations. This step is treated in detail in 5.5.

5.3.4 Step 3. Knowing What Baseline Information You Need

Many baseline studies suffer from information overload and lack of use. When deciding whether you need to collect baseline data for a particular performance question, ask yourself if you need to compare information to be able to answer the question. If not, or if information already exists, then you will not need to collect baseline data. This step is treated in detail in 5.6.

5.3.5 Step 4. Selecting Which Data Collection Methods to Use, by Whom and How Often

Once you have decided what information is needed and what indicators will be used, you need to decide which methods will be used for gathering the data. You have many options: methods that are more qualitative or more quantitative, more or less participatory, and more or less resource intensive. Each will provide information of varying degrees of accuracy and reliability.
Deciding which methods to use requires balancing these different factors (see Box 5-4). When you examine the consequences of a particular performance question or indicator, you may need to change it if it is impractical or too expensive. This includes looking at who will be using the method and how often it will be applied. For example, if you have no existing capacity to use your preferred method, you need to plan training – or choose another method if you have no resources for this.

Frequency of collection also needs to be established. This will vary per question and indicator. If data for one critical indicator needs to be collected often, then you may need to reduce the frequency of another less important indicator or delete it altogether. Methods are considered in detail in Section 6 and Annex D.

Box 5-4. Balancing cost, type of information and extra benefits

Suppose your performance question is “What improvements have there been in household food security as a result of the project’s activities?” You will need to know two main pieces of information: (1) the types and extent of changes in food security as experienced by the target households and (2) the extent to which these changes can be attributed to the project. This type of information would not be analysed very often, as it would only change slowly. So a survey once every two years or so should give you an indication of changes.

To gather information on food security changes you could consider three different methods: (1) a detailed household survey conducted by independent researchers, (2) a participatory assessment process where women household members do their own monitoring and discuss their findings, or (3) focus-group meetings to discuss changes that specific social groups have experienced. The first method would be the most resource intensive but may yield the most quantifiable outputs. If well facilitated, the second method can also yield precise results but at a lower cost than the first method and perhaps with interesting discussions from which new ideas emerge. An extra advantage of this method could be better understanding about the project by village women. The third method would yield the least precise and least quantitative information but would be the least resource intensive. Before embarking on resource-intensive data-collection exercises, carefully consider whether a simpler method would yield sufficient information of good enough quality for your purposes.

5.3.7. Step 5. Identifying the Necessary Practical Support for Information Gathering

For a method to lead to the information you require, you will need to organise the conditions to make it work. These are often forgotten in the focus on identification of indicators but are critical to success. For each method, consider if and how you need to:

- develop forms to record data;
- develop forms, filing systems and databases for collating and storing information;
- train staff, partners or community members who will be involved;
- check and validate data;
- organise external M&E or research expertise that may be needed;
- agree on responsibilities for different tasks;
- ensure everyone has sufficient financial resources and equipment.

This topic is dealt with in detail in Sections 6 and 7.
5.3.7 Step 6. Organising Analysis, Feedback and Change

In the rush to get out and start collecting data, many M&E units pay insufficient attention to the process of using the information for analysis and directing changes in the project.

To make sure that data will be used – and not just collected – think about how you will organise the analysis of information for each performance question. Sometimes a performance question cannot be answered without prior analysis of several bits of information. Who will do it? When will it happen? Also consider what form information should be in so that it can be used by different stakeholders. For example, will it be useful to present information visually, in graphs or maps? Or do you need to organise several community meetings to get more feedback on the initial analysis of the information?

Most importantly, consider how the generated information can be used to check progress and make improvements as the project proceeds. This topic is discussed in Sections 6 and 8.

5.4 Being Guided by Performance Questions

5.4.1 What Is a Performance Question?

At project start-up, most projects will move straight into identifying quantitative indicators after revising their objective hierarchy of the logframe matrix (see 3.3). This commonly results in long lists of quantitative indicators that focus only on targets, leaving out other information essential to explain the resulting numbers. Without understanding the "why", it is difficult to adjust the project strategy and operations to achieve more impact.

Instead, try starting by identifying the key questions – performance questions – that you need to answer for each activity and output and for the purpose and the goal. Focusing first on questions you can avoid being overwhelmed by indicators that, in the end, may not tell you what you really need to know in order to improve the project.

A performance question helps focus your information-seeking and information-analysis processes on what is necessary in order to know if the project is performing as planned or, if not, why not. Once you have your performance questions, you can more easily decide what information you need to track rather than what is nice to track.

A performance question makes it easier for you to analyse different kinds of information together by giving you a structure for combining the information. This is particularly important at higher levels in the objective hierarchy. Having a structure will reduce the problem of having different indicators from different levels in the objective hierarchy and not being able to figure out what is going on. Table 5.5 shows this clearly. Projects without the performance question will only have the information/indicators in the right hand column, which they then have to make sense of in relation to the goal, purpose or output.

Let’s take an example related to training, which can be found in most projects. Suppose one of your project objectives is “agricultural extension workers using more participatory approaches in their work with farmers”. The related project activity might be “organise five 10-day training courses for a total of 60 extension workers”. It is obviously easy to keep track of the number of courses run, for how long and for how many participants. At the output level, you could simply add up the number of extension staff who have received training in participatory methods. But you are probably aiming to improve the extent to which these participatory methods are actually used in the field and, then, the contribution to farmers adopting improved farming practices.
A quantitative indicator could be “the per cent of trained extension officers using participatory methods in the field”. But to what do the terms “participatory” and “using” refer? It says nothing about the extent or quality with which the methods are being used so the indicator provides relatively useless information. In this case, a performance question is more useful. For example, “Are the trained extension officers using their participatory skills effectively in the field?” Self-reporting by extension agents about how their work in the field is progressing can be supplemented by reports from farmers with whom extension agents interact. Only by counting the numbers, by knowing how well the skills are being applied and how farmers value this change will you have an answer that helps you know if the project is being managed for impact.

Remember that the activity level in the logframe does not need indicators so performance questions will also not be needed at that level.

Table 5-5. Examples of performance questions and the link to information needs, including indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Objective</th>
<th>Examples of Performance Questions</th>
<th>Examples of Information Needs and Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Goal:** sustained improvement in the off-farm income of 135,000 poor households living in the Penkalingo lowlands | • What kinds of improvements have been made as a result of increased income opportunities facilitated by the project?  
• Who has benefited from these improvements?  
• Which target groups have not benefited?  
• What is the likelihood that improvements will be sustained?  
• What are the unintended negative or positive impacts of these enhanced income-generating activities (IGAs)? | • Types of improvements per target group  
• Level of income changes (increase/decrease) per target group  
• People’s own assessment of why incomes have increased or decreased  
• Per cent of households who have not benefited  
• Threats to sustaining income increases  
• Negative impacts of IGAs (social, environmental, etc.)  
• Other positive development impacts of IGAs |
| **Purpose:** enhance income-generating activities for the project target groups | • What types of income generation have been created?  
• How many people have taken up which new IGAs? | • Types of IGAs created  
• Number of people who are pursuing each IGA  
• Types of IGAs for which people feel a need |
| **Output 1:** savings and credit services available to the poor improved | • Who has benefited from which type of services?  
• Who has been excluded? | • Types of savings/credit services  
• Numbers of people making use of each service  
• Problems with services and their causes  
• Numbers of target group excluded from each service  
• Level of local capacity to sustain services |
| **Output 2:** entrepreneurial skills among participating households developed | • What types of skills have been improved among how many households?  
• Is there a gender balance in skill development?  
• Do these skills fulfill a need in the project area? | • Types of entrepreneurial skills developed  
• Level of skills developed (women/men)  
• Numbers in target group (women/men) with new skills  
• Numbers of target group excluded from skill development and the causes of this  
• Local demand for new skills developed |
5.4.2. Working with Performance Questions

Project staff are so used to immediately diving into indicators that at first they might find it a bit confusing to focus on performance questions beforehand. The following question can help you find a good performance question for each level of the objective hierarchy:

What questions would you need to answer to know the extent to which you are achieving the objective and to explain the success or failure of actual results?

The performance questions you identify may be quite simple. For example, at the “activity” level in the objective hierarchy, all you need to do is find out if the activity has been carried out well and on time. Also at the “output” level of the objective hierarchy you will often be able to limit the questions to a few that are relatively easy to quantify. For example, in Table 5-5, the output level questions are “What types of skills have been improved among how many households?” “Is there a gender balance in skill development?” and “Do these skills fulfil a need in the project area?”

At the purpose and goal levels in the objective hierarchy, the performance questions become more qualitative and more effective when posed along with other questions. This is because observable changes at these levels are the result of all the underlying activities or outputs. To assess performance at the purpose and goal level, you will need to consider the interactions between the changes at each level and whether the changes you see can be attributed to project activities or outputs.

One particularly important type of performance question concerns projects trying to innovate how they deliver certain activities or outputs. Learning by trying out new ways of working becomes vital. For example, the project might have planned to support the establishment of self-reliant water users’ associations. But you might only discover the best way of doing this after several attempts and corrections. For example in the FODESA project, Mali, management will initiate annual participatory reviews and impact assessments in each community. They are sub-contracting this responsibility to NGOs and consultants. As it is a methodological experiment, important performance questions for FODESA could include “Do villagers feel that the sub-contractors are facilitating the participatory reviews well?” and “Is the information coming from these annual reviews helping guide the project strategy and operations?” In effect, this becomes a mini research project for FODESA. As it becomes clearer how best to do annual village reviews, the performance questions will change or even be eliminated.

Performance questions do not have to be elaborate – nor do you need many. The most basic types of performance questions are shown in Box 5-5. After the performance questions are agreed, then you can decide what information you need to answer them. This includes indicator identification.

Box 5-5. The basic performance questions per level of the objective hierarchy

- **Activities** - What have we actually done?
- **Outputs** - What have we delivered as a result of project activities (e.g., number of people trained)?
- **Outcomes (results)** - What has been achieved as a result of the outputs (e.g., extent to which those trained are effectively using new skills)?
- **Impacts** - What has been achieved as a result of the outcomes (e.g., to what extent are NGOs more effective)? What contribution is being made to the goal? Are there any unanticipated positive or negative impacts?
- **Lessons** - What has been learned from the project that can contribute to improved project implementation or to building relevant fields of knowledge?
5.5 Focusing on Key Information and Optimal Indicators

Once you have drafted a list of performance questions, the next step is to identify what information is needed to answer the questions. First check if the question can be answered with a simple, reliable indicator. For activities and outputs this may be possible. If it is not possible (see Box 5-6), then you need to think more carefully about the different types of information you require to answer the performance questions. This will be the case particularly for the higher levels in the objective hierarchy – goal and purpose – where indicators are rarely able to provide the insights needed to judge outcomes and impacts.

Box 5-6. Knowing when a single indicator is not enough

You might have an objective as follows:

“By the end of the fifth year of the project, 50% of the families in the project area cover 25% of their annual cash needs from selling services based on the skills they acquired through training provided by the project.”

There is no single indicator to measure this objective. You will need different types of information:

- per cent of families earning income from skills they acquired through training workshops provided by the project;
- amount earned by households who participated in the training workshops provided by the project;
- annual cash needs per household.

5.5.1 Types of Change and Information

Your first step will be to be completely clear about what information you need to answer your performance question. Do you want to know about changes in:

- the presence of something (e.g., numbers of seed banks or farmer-led field trials)?
- the type of access to an innovation or new service (e.g., are worse-off people or better-off people participating in new crop trials)?
- the level of use (e.g., the frequency with which each farmer uses a rotating fund or other credit source)?
- the extent of an activity or coverage (e.g., number of members of the credit group or number of people involved with maize trials – and who is excluded)?
- the relevance of the agricultural innovation (e.g., do seed banks resolve a key production bottleneck or not)?
- the quality of an innovation (e.g., the quality of seeds in the seed bank or the effectiveness of an integrated pest management approach to banana weevil control)?
- the effort required to achieve a change (e.g., the labour required for new soil management with contour line ploughing)?

Box 5-7 describes an interesting framework that can help you identify the changes in which you are interested.
Box 5-7. Identifying impact indicators using the Grassroots Development Framework

The Inter-American Foundation created the Grassroots Development Framework (GDF) to measure the results and impact of projects. It is based on the premise that grassroots development produces results at three levels – individuals, organisations, society – and impacts of two types – tangible and intangible. The combination of three levels of results and two types of impacts means that there are six main categories that represent local development objectives and for which locally relevant indicators can be chosen.

- At the individual or family level, tangible impacts relate to changes in quality of life, including people’s environment and livelihoods. Intangible impacts refer to personal capacities, concerning changes in individual expectations, motivations and actions.
- At the organisational or social-capital level, tangible impacts pertain to local management and reflect the capacity of organisations and municipalities to engage in local development. Intangible impacts refer to commitment to collaboration and look at changes in the development values and practices of local leadership.
- At the level of the society as a whole, tangible impacts include creating civil society opportunities that deal with the institutionalisation of democracy. Intangible impacts measure the basis of citizenship in terms of changes in culture of citizenship, or collective behaviour, towards greater tolerance and respect for social and cultural diversity.

Irrespective of what information you seek, you will need to understand the reasons for the changes you observe. If these are different than anticipated, you will need to ask the question, “Why is there more or less change than anticipated?” in order to manage the project for better impact (see Box 5-8).

Box 5-8. “Why” does not come from numbers

In the REP project, Ghana, beneficiary contact monitoring has allowed more participation of project clients by gathering their ideas and opinions for review and action by management. But the focus is still on quantitative indicators. For example, after each training, evaluation forms are sent to participants to collect information/opinions on aspects such as: teaching style (methods, materials, teacher’s attitude), perceived immediate and long-term contributions of the training, technical competency of the teacher and overall usefulness. Respondents only answer “yes” or “no”. This does not encourage the explanation of why. Data interpretation is only adding up the number of responses, without understanding causes and seeking ideas through open-ended questions.

You are likely to need a variety of information to answer your performance questions (see Box 5-9), including:

- indicators: simple quantitative indicators, complex or compound indicators, indices, qualitative indicators (see Table 5-6);
- focused qualitative information;
- open-ended qualitative information;
- background information;
- general observations of interactions with stakeholders.
Box 5-9. More than indicators in Uganda

As part of the DDSP programme in Uganda, the planning unit of each district’s local government is responsible for monitoring implementation progress and assessing impact. To fulfil these responsibilities, it seeks many kinds of information:

- Physical and financial progress information so decisions can be made (or revised) about spending and resource distribution, helping keep the project functioning and within its budget.
- Information on the distribution of project benefits, e.g., some people may benefit more than others. This is useful to groups wanting to monitor project equity and accountability.
- The target population’s responses to the services and inputs being provided by the project. Such information can help ensure acceptability and usefulness of project activities.
- Studies on the specific implementation problems a project faces so that the cause(s) can be identified and practical solutions recommended.
- Information about the impact on the target population, especially on changes in quality of life and living standards (income, health, empowerment, relationship to environment, etc.).
- Other evidence for compliance and accountability to meet donor requirements.

5.5.2 Different Kinds of Indicators

Indicators are the most common type of information associated with M&E. Table 5-7 describes different kinds of indicators.

Some indicators are simple and straightforward, particularly those that deal with measuring progress with activities, for example, “the number of kilometres of irrigation cannel constructed”. Other indicators, such as the human development index (HDI), used by UNDP to rank all countries, compares people’s wellbeing via a combination of several weighed indicators. Table 5-6 shows examples of indicators for four common categories.

Table 5-6. Examples of four common categories of indicators in rural development projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Security</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Empowerment of Grassroots Institutions</th>
<th>Empowerment of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• change in food production</td>
<td>• change in household real income</td>
<td>• change in farmers’ groups’ participation in decision-making at project/local level</td>
<td>• change in female enrolment in primary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in cultivated area</td>
<td>• change in access to off-farm income</td>
<td>• change in autonomous farmers’ group formation in project area</td>
<td>• change in number of women’s groups formed in project area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in yields of staple food</td>
<td>• change in access to capital</td>
<td>• change in grassroots ability to self-monitor and evaluate own progress</td>
<td>• change in number of loans approved / disbursed for women’s groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in consumption of staples</td>
<td>• change in access to labour</td>
<td>• change in capacity to market own products</td>
<td>• change in number of women’s groups accessing second and third loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in prices for staple food</td>
<td>• change in access to irrigation facilities</td>
<td>• change in terms and conditions of marketing arrangements</td>
<td>• change in number of women members of local production/service associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in access to markets</td>
<td>• change in availability of basic needs services</td>
<td>• change in women’s decision-making capacity at household level</td>
<td>• change in women’s participation in decision-making at project/local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in on-farm food storage capacity</td>
<td>• change in access to safe water</td>
<td>• change in women’s participation in decision-making at project/local level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in chronic malnutrition among children</td>
<td>• change in access to basic education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• change in rate of stunting (under 5)</td>
<td>• change in access to basic health services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5-7. Examples of different types of indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Indicators</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Simple quantitative indicators | • kilometres of roads built  
|                             | • person-days of training in X subject conducted  
|                             | • average yield from X crop in Y areas                                  | This indicator requires only one measurement of a straightforward unit.                                                                                                                                 |
| Complex quantitative indicators | • number of months for which households experience food shortages      | Here there are a number of different bits of information involved. Months, households and types of food shortages. Without specifying which types of households are experiencing what types of food shortages and to what degree the indicator will not be so useful. This makes the indicator more complex than just measuring one simple factor such as average crop yield. |
| Compound indicators         | • number of effectively functioning water users associations in the project area  
|                             | • number of village development plans completed that meet funding criteria | These indicators have a standard in them that needs defining and assessing. Effectively functioning needs to be defined and means you need to assess the quality of each association. The same is true for the village plans - they need to be assessed against funding criteria. Only then can they be counted. |
| Indices                     | • index of irrigation system performance                                 | Indices combine a number of different indicators to enable comparison. The human development index is a well-known example. Working with indices is statistically complex and so they are not commonly used in project M&E. |
| Proxy indicators            | • per cent of households with bicycles                                   | This is an indicator that is not precise but rather is used as an approximate, symbolic. This example could be a proxy indicator for a certain level of wellbeing in an area where bicycles are expensive and difficult to buy. |
| Qualitative indicators - open-ended | • perceptions of stakeholders about the overall performance of the project | Open-ended qualitative information enables you to find out from people what is important to them. Open-ended questions enable you to gather information on things about which you may not have thought to ask. |
| Qualitative indicators - focused | • Perceptions of stakeholders about a very specific aspect of the project  | Focused qualitative information is important when you want specific information.                                                                                                                                 |

5.5.3 Formulating a Clear Indicator

To be useful, an indicator must be clear. This makes it possible to measure. But most project staff know that finding a clear indicator is more difficult than it might first appear. What is needed to make an indicator clear?

By looking at the performance questions for the goal, purpose(s), outcomes and outputs, you can identify what type of data you need to collect to answer the questions. For example, if your output is “to rehabilitate degraded lands in the X area”, then you might want an indicator such as “area of degraded land rehabilitated”. But what do “degraded” and “rehabilitated” mean?

A clear indicator includes the following elements:

- specified target group to which the indicator will be applied;
- specific unit(s) of measurement to be used for the indicator;
- specific timeframe over which it will be monitored;
- reference to a baseline/benchmark for comparison;
- defined qualities (if an adjective is needed – see below);
- specific location in which indicator will be applied.
Let’s take an indicator proposed by an IFAD-supported project in China to assess impact at the purpose level of the project: “enterprise start-ups, in particular by women”. This is too vague to be measurable. Specifying this indicator precisely would turn it into, for example, “the number of new formal and informal enterprises each year started by poor female-headed and male-headed households in province X as compared to the original number”. Another example of a weak indicator is from a project in Yemen: “number of fodder-processing equipment”. To be able to monitor this, you need to be specific, for example, “the annual increase in the number of newly purchased fodder-processing machinery of type X since the beginning of the project per target group household”.

You might be wondering if a qualitative indicator can be specific. By definition a qualitative indicator is not as precise as a quantitative indicator, since you are consciously leaving it open-ended. Section 5.5.4 discusses this in more detail.

Special attention must be paid to those indicators that include an adjective. Common examples include “successfully implemented”, “adequately used”, “effectively applied”, “degraded land” or “people with too little food”. Such descriptive terms can be interpreted in many ways and so can lead to confusion.

A common example occurs in projects that aim to establish micro-credit groups, community self-help groups or community plans. Because you want to know their quality, your indicator will probably include adjectives such as “well-functioning micro-credit groups”, “empowered self-help groups” or “participatory community plans”. For example, what does a “participatory community plan” mean? Does it mean that 50% of the adult people were asked to contribute ideas or that 80% agreed with the final plan or that it has been approved by the local village council? You will need to define any term precisely that might have multiple meanings.

The more precise you can make each indicator, the less likely you are to have misunderstanding about it among the people involved when it comes to collecting the data and analysing them. Seeking local indicators can put out some useful results (see Box 5-10).

**Box 5-10. Examples of local poverty indicators**

- type and size of funerals (used in Ghana and Burkina Faso where spending on funerals is valued)
- availability of new clothes for celebrations (many locations)
- postponement of marriages due to lack of dowry (Somalia)
- regular use of shoes (India)
- eating of a third meal per day (various locations)
- possibility of sleeping in a different room than the farm animals (India)
- women who possess cooking utensils or plates for guests in adequate size and quantity (Mali, Sudan)

To get people thinking about possible indicators, particularly qualitative ones that might be difficult to formulate, here are some questions to inspire concrete answers:

- If the project is headed for failure, how will you know? (Word these indicators of “failure” in the positive and you will know what you want to see change.)
- What do you mean when you say “improved nutrition”? (or whatever objective/purpose/outcome you are discussing)
- How do you notice when an impact has occurred?
- Can you give a concrete example of how you observe an impact?
Some methods are also useful for identifying indicators, such as matrix scoring and impact flow diagrams (see Annex D).

5.5.4 Working with Qualitative Information and Indicators

The strong focus of M&E on quantitative data in the past is increasingly being balanced by a focus on qualitative indicators as people expect these to provide more in-depth information. However, these types of indicators are interchangeable and compatible (see Box 5-11). For example, to assess the quality of a workshop on integrated pest management, you can gather the opinions of farmers who attended the course and make lists of their views about strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement. Alternatively, a more quantitative approach would be to ask the farmers to indicate whether they are satisfied with the quality of the training on a scale of 0 to 5, and then count the numbers of farmers in each category. Clearly the ranking will not give you ideas on what to improve but it does give a picture of the degree of satisfaction.

Box 5-11. Qualitative depth in quantitative indicators

One of the key distinctions of Ugandan consultant Dan Kisauza’s way of using the logframe is to discuss how to build the logframe based on how the project staff should implement the vision, not what they should do. This requires focusing on qualitative, rather than quantitative, aspects of the project when developing indicators. This can be done by turning indicator development into the development of a statement about how staff intend to implement the activities to meet their objectives, incorporating a process dimension into the plans. For example, instead of a more common quantitative indicator for the wider goal of food security such as “two new varieties of X developed,” the new indicator would be “two new varieties developed in collaboration with farmers (with some evidence of farmer acceptance of the varieties).”

For qualitative indicators to offer rigorous insights into important questions, you need to be specific, just as with quantitative indicators. Specify a qualitative indicator by defining the following:

- the topic of interest (based on your performance question);
- the type of change you are trying to understand, including the unit of analysis (e.g., changes in a household, in a village, in a region);
- the timeframe over which it will be monitored;
- the location in which the indicator will be applied.

For example, “perceptions of 25% of participants attending each training programme on topic Y, about how it has assisted them to carry out their work responsibilities better” is much easier to implement than one that is commonly found, “skills of workshop participants”. The rules for qualitative indicators are the same as for quantitative indicators – they must be measurable, representative, reliable and feasible.

For qualitative indicators, the idea of “measurable” refers to the ability to find data on it rather than being able to count it. For example in Zimbabwe, a project explicitly stated that it would “produce major unquantifiable benefits to the inhabitants of the project area, and to the nation”. Examples they gave included “increased capacity of inhabitants to command the assistance of agricultural extension and research workers” and “development of a policy and development framework for public investment in drier areas”.
You might well have a set of qualitative aspects of development that cannot be molded into indicators to measure (see Box 5-12). Examples include “social mobilisation process”, “collective management” or “linkages with service providers”. In such cases, the use of case studies that describe what is happening in a community may help you understand such processes (see Box 5-13).

**Box 5-12. Measuring the immeasurable**

In Bangladesh, IFAD-supported projects work with community-based organisations (CBOs). The implementing partners are NGOs, which need to monitor the growth of CBOs. CBO growth can be monitored with indicators such as: existence of need assessment conducted by the CBO itself, democratically elected leaders and CBO-initiated resource mobilisation. Such indicators can be discussed in a workshop setting with the CBOs, where participants can also talk about appropriate corrective actions needed by whom, in case CBOs experience constraints.

In a rural poverty programme in the USA, community revitalisation was a prime goal. The chosen indicators of success were “attitudes of people (community spirit), voting in elections, trash collection, clean-up of dilapidated structures, home ownership and community capacity measured by number of empowerment community organisations with networks formed and the ability to access resources and develop leaders”.

**Box 5-13. Focused qualitative studies to deal with complex aspects of change**

In the WUPAP programme, Nepal, the performance of the programme’s approach at the village level will be assessed as follows:

1. Measure the degree to which participatory approaches have been used in the field.
2. Document the community’s response towards the programme as a whole.
3. Measure changes in the vision of the community and role of poor, women and children at present and in the future.
4. Document changes in attitudes and approaches of service providers.
5. Assess the community’s willingness and capacity to take on more responsibility.
6. Examine the benefits of programme activities and distribution among different groups.
7. Record early signs of impact on livelihoods and improvements in material well-being.
8. Assess changes in the social mobilisation process, structure of the CBO and terms of partnership.

These case studies should be undertaken in relatively mature CBOs of different districts, by examining CBO records, plans and progress reports and participatory techniques. The programme management is responsible for presenting findings and recommendations based on the case studies in the annual stakeholder workshops.

Often a fundamental part of many projects, one that relates strongly to qualitative indicators, is the institutional development of community-based organisations (CBOs). The creation and strengthening of these is seen by many IFAD-supported projects as the key to sustained impacts. Many projects, therefore, need to assess issues such as group dynamics, equality and transparency in the group, learning orientation of the group, etc.

An increasingly common approach to assessing the quality of CBOs is the use of a grading system. This combines a qualitative assessment of progress in institutional development with a quantitative score. Box 5-14 shows several applications of this approach.

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5.5.5 Checking the Quality of Indicators

Being clear about an indicator is what makes it measurable. But other factors will determine if you can use it. The need for a manageable, and therefore small, set of indicators makes it especially important to ensure they are high quality. Review each potential indicator to ensure that it is not only clearly defined but is also representative, reliable and feasible.

If an indicator fails on any of these counts (see Table 5-8), then it will not help you answer your performance question and you will need to adjust it or find a substitute.

An indicator is fully representative if it covers the most important aspect(s) of the objective you want to track. As this will be hard to do for higher-level objectives, you will probably need several indicators to make sure the set of indicators is representative of the type of change you want to understand.

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An indicator is more likely to be reliable if it is accurate, measured in a standardised way with sound and consistent sampling procedures, and directly reflects the objective concerned. It should also be well-founded, with a well-established or probable relationship to the objective. For example, stunting (low height-for-age) in children is a well-founded indicator of lack of food, since many studies have demonstrated the relationship.

An indicator is feasible if it requires data that can be obtained at reasonable cost and effort. You will need to consider both financial and technical feasibility:

1. Use your budget limit to decide what you “need to know”, not how you can include all that is “nice to know”. Most projects start with defining what they want to know, then later discover that it takes too much effort and money to collect the data. Rather, budget for M&E during project planning and assess how much monitoring is possible given the available budget. Ask what and how much information can realistically be generated given the resources you are prepared to allocate to the task. Also consider how easy or difficult it is to get hold of these data. Be aware that some indicators may appear to represent little additional financial cost but will cost the time of the respondents to answer and of the staff in terms of data entry, processing and analysis.

2. Confirm that you have the human capacity to assess the indicators. Project M&E staff in Morocco had always simply recorded progress to meet the numerical targets of the project. They soon became aware of their limitations when outlining how to assess the wider project impact of improved living conditions. For example, they identified the need to analyse whether planting along contour bunds would increase dry matter production for cattle, whether this in turn would lead to increased cattle weight and whether this would then increase household income. However, in this case, further development of such performance monitoring was restricted both by the lack of access to resources persons with the skills to carry out these kinds of analysis, and also by the lack of support for M&E from the project itself.

3. Avoid duplication. Find out which organisations already have information you need. Some statistical data are readily available from national institutions (national statistics bureau, private companies, census bureaux, statistical office of the ministry of agriculture, banks, etc.). This can be vital background information to explain progress. Systems for tapping such “secondary” data should be prepared for at start-up. For example, every year in Indonesia, the bureau of statistics conducts household surveys (200,000 households) and an agricultural census is undertaken every five years. One project manager in Indonesia said, “If we want to know if our livestock project is making progress, we should get data from the sub-district health posts on under-5 mortality and illnesses. Also figures on the total savings in credit schemes and in banks provide very accurate information on progress with farmer groups.”
5.5.6 Participatory (Impact) Indicator Identification

Indicator identification can be pursued with different methods and with varying degrees of stakeholder participation. Particularly when assessing impacts, some projects ask primary stakeholders to define what they see as impact and to use their indicators to monitor and evaluate. The process for participatory indicator identification is very similar to overall indicator identification.

1. Decide what aspect of M&E will be participatory - is it to be impacts or implementation aspects (e.g., activities, quality of service providers).
2. Reach agreement on who should be involved in determining indicators.
3. Create a good event (time, location, facilities, facilitation) for all groups to make a meaningful contribution.
4. If there is more than one stakeholder group, you have two options.
   Option 1. Draft the indicators with each group. You should end up with an initial list of possible indicators, missing information about the indicators and the rationale for these indicators. Share the lists of indicators with all the groups. Organise an event with group representatives to select the most appropriate indicators, as there are usually too many. Decide which ones best answer the performance questions in which you are all interested. Begin by developing criteria for selecting indicators. You can use matrix scoring to facilitate the prioritisation (see Annex D).
   Option 2. The project team and implementing partners can draft an initial list, which is then reworked with primary stakeholders. Follow a similar process of prioritising the indicators to monitor.
5. Define units of analysis (e.g., credit groups, household, community organisations) and the sampling procedure.

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Table 5-8. Deciding if indicators are of good enough quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Quality</th>
<th>What to Do with the Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is measurable, representative, reliable and feasible.</td>
<td>Fine, use it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is measurable, reliable and feasible, but not representative enough.</td>
<td>Use it and try to find additional types of information or indicators until you feel the performance question can be answered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is measurable, representative and feasible, but not very reliable.</td>
<td>Is it reliable enough to use if everyone is made aware of its flaws? If so, use it and try to find additional information that together could produce a more reliable picture. If not, drop it and try to find a substitute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is measurable, representative and reliable, but not feasible.</td>
<td>Can another indicator or set of indicators represent the objective reasonably? If so, drop the one first suggested. If not, re-examine the indicator's feasibility. There may be a more creative and cost-effective way of finding the required data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is measurable and feasible but not representative enough and not very reliable.</td>
<td>Is it reliable enough to use if everyone is made aware of its flaws? If so, use it and try to find additional information to help produce a more reliable picture. If not, drop it and try to find a substitute. In any case, since the indicator has two significant problems, be more inclined to drop it than keep it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The indicator is reliable, but not measurable or not representative or not reliable.</td>
<td>Forget about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

6. Decide on data collection methods (see Section 6). This might require a revision of the indicators, if the methods prove inadequate.

7. Design data processing formats and decide on the analysis process (see Sections 6 and 8).

8. Pre-test the indicators, methods and data analysis. Make sure that they are adequate and manageable and that they will give you the information you need to answer the performance questions. Don't skip this step! It can save you much wasted effort and resources.

Consider that involving more stakeholder groups in identifying indicators requires a process of negotiating about what “success” means for each group, therefore requiring more time. The negotiation process becomes critical, as different views and priorities need to be reduced to a limited number of indicators. Make sure primary stakeholder participation is meaningful – and not token.

Negotiations can reinforce a shared vision of development, particularly when working with groups that differ strongly. This can be an important benefit of participatory development of the M&E system.

Remember that you will need to keep updating indicators as people’s development visions or policies change and information needs shift.

A good example of the link between ownership of indicators and empowerment comes from a large forestry programme in Nepal. The implementing partners worked with forestry user groups (FUGs), using parallel sets of indicators. Programme staff identified one set and the other came from the groups themselves. In one area, a third set of indicators was identified by local women, who had additional, specific concerns that did not emerge in the FUGs’ initial indicator set.

Box 5-15. Participatory indicator identification in Mexico

In a farmer-to-farmer extension programme in Mexico, the project team followed these steps to develop indicators:

- Define broad indicator areas (based on higher-level objectives).
- Select currently available indicators for these areas, according to existing programme use and literature.
- Define stakeholder groups.
- Select stakeholder groups to be consulted.
- Develop indicators with different stakeholder groups.
- Test these across different stakeholder groups to assess their significance to others and effectiveness at indicating change.
- Agree on a priority list among indicator options.
- Carry out fieldwork to gather data for the indicators.
- Create lists of indicators for full evaluation use, indicators with specific importance for different actors (with a limit, e.g., three key indicators for each stakeholder group.

The programme team identified the range of different institutional and individual actors who affect and are affected by the project. They then prioritised three stakeholder groups to be consulted for indicator development in this trial phase: farmers (participating and non-participating), farmer-extension agents (and their wives) and funding agencies.

The research team initially proposed seven indicator areas. These were eventually narrowed down to four, based on the groups’ objectives: (1) changes to local, regional, political and sectoral practice and policy (e.g., level of dependence on external resources, involvement of local people, growth of local institutions and changes in policy and practice); (2) dissemination impacts: extension to other localities/regions (e.g., horizontal and vertical linkages with other projects, agencies and NGOs beyond the region); (3) changes to the roles of individuals in the project (primarily the coordinator, outside advisors, immediate project participants and family of NGO staff); and (4) changes in the institutional structure (within and beyond the actual project).

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8 Blauert and Quintanar, see footnote 2.
When you choose participatory indicator identification and your project follows an overall participatory approach, you will need to be extra flexible. Such projects commonly start tentatively with small interventions, based on participatory appraisals or with capacity-building activities. Only after discussions have led to consensus about which activities will be implemented, can you start with precise indicator identification. During the course of such projects, new partners often join, new insights are generated and new development goals emerge. Each change brings the need to review existing indicators (see Box 5-16), as the following projects saw:

- In Laos, farmers shifted from wanting to monitor negative criteria, which reflected their apprehension about the new technology being introduced, to positive ones once the technology’s beneficial effects emerged.

- In an NGO-managed project in northeast Brazil, only 17 of the initially selected 22 indicators were monitored, as some indicators and methods proved too difficult in practice. For example, the indicator “production from banana stands where weevil control was being practised as compared to control plots with no weevil control” was impossible. Comparing production from different plots with many uncontrollable variables would make the data unreliable.

- In Nepal, shared understanding was weak about key areas of work, such as “institutional strengthening” and “timber yield regulation”, and also indicators were of low quality. As understanding grew, the indicators became more precise.

**Box 5-16. Trading off participation in M&E for stable indicators?**

For those interested in seeing trends for fixed indicators, primary stakeholder participation may pose a problem. Any change to an indicator means reducing the possibility of producing a time series of data. Yet if a monitoring process is going to be participatory, this means including new partners as the project evolves. A participatory M&E system has to adapt to changing information needs, to the changing skills of those involved and to changing levels of participation as new partners join and others leave.
5.6 Making Comparisons and the Role of Baselines

5.6.1 Having a Basis for Comparison

Monitoring involves repeated assessments of a situation over time. Having an initial basis for comparison helps you assess what has changed over a period of time and if this is a result of the project’s presence. So you must have information about the initial starting point or situation before any intervention has taken place. This information is what is commonly known as the “baseline” of information. It is the line of base conditions against which comparisons are made later on.

A baseline study can also help in redefining the project at start-up. The PROCHALATE project in El Salvador undertook a baseline study early on, which allowed the team to identify significant differences between the diagnosis information of the appraisal report and the actual situation. This information was used to adjust the project’s goals.

Most projects have great difficulty with baselines. Few projects have one that is useful for judging change. Some common problems with baseline studies are that they are made late or not at all, are excessively detailed or too general and irrelevant, have a sample that is too large and is beyond the analytical capacity of the project or implementing partners, do not include a control group, contain data on farmers that are not within the primary target group, etc. Often baselines cannot fulfil their prime purpose of facilitating evaluations, so are rarely used during impact assessments (see Box 5-17).

Even if you do not use a baseline, you will need to find some form of comparison to know what the project has achieved.

Box 5-17. Overwhelming baselines in Bangladesh

The ADIP project in Bangladesh gathered an impressive amount of baseline data: household information for over 1,900 households, as well as district and municipal information profiles. Implementing NGOs created socio-economic profiles of groups, with data on each beneficiary group at the moment of group formation, to confirm the eligibility of the selected persons as marginal and landless or as small farmer group members. These data were kept by the NGOs. However, the resources spent on collecting the information was not justified as it was hardly used. The baseline data were only partly useful because:

- the data were actually collected before the selection of groups;
- the samples did not systematically include farmers actually participating in the project;
- the data did not refer to specific project-participant groups and households.

These factors also made it impossible to use the data for retrospectively composing a control group. If these surveys, and future ones, are to be useful for monitoring impacts, then a sampling procedure that includes farmers “with project participation” and farmers “without project participation” is necessary. The project can also build on recent participatory impact monitoring by establishing a small sample of marginal and landless or small farmers – male and female – and including a control group, for continued impact assessment with annual surveys.

In participatory projects, baseline studies need extra attention. Such projects may start tentatively and with smaller and more diverse interventions. Given the uncertainty about the final orientation of such projects at the onset, it is difficult for them to determine early on precisely what information to collect for the baseline. The idea of a “rolling baseline” might be useful (see below). Other organisations undertake open-ended participatory appraisals as the beginning of a baseline, which they follow up with focused surveys once it is clear what additional data are needed.
5.6.2. Options for Making a Comparative Analysis Possible

Proving a project impact requires comparing changes that result from the project. You have three options for this:

1. Compare the difference between “before” the project started and “after” it started.

2. Track changes “with” and “without” a project presence. This means comparing changes inside the project area with those in similar locations outside the project’s sphere of influence.

3. Compare the difference between similar groups – one that has been working with the project and a so-called “control group” that is not influenced by the project.

Each option has advantages and disadvantages (see Table 5-9). All three options can be undertaken with or without the use of pre-determined indicators, and in more qualitative or quantitative ways.

In the TNWDP project in India, project management used a control group (see option 3 in Table 5-9). Baseline surveys were carried out among the potential target group and a control group. Initial identification of the beneficiaries for the baseline survey was made by the implementing partners, local NGOs, followed by a survey of these beneficiaries for verification. The baseline survey among target and control groups was supplemented by economic data collected on a sample basis in project villages covering all three districts during the first three years of implementation.

Table 5-9. Comparing the different options for comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Comparison</th>
<th>Basis of Comparison</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before/After project</td>
<td>Changes over time in the project area</td>
<td>Offers clear moments for data collection</td>
<td>Requires understanding which other factors influenced the outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May be difficult to explain the changes observed due to other influencing factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With/Without project</td>
<td>Changes between one geographic area where the project has been active and another where it has not</td>
<td>Can make it easier to explain causal factors of the change</td>
<td>Might be difficult to find comparable areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/Target group</td>
<td>Changes among groups of people who have been targeted by the project and similar groups of people who have not been targeted</td>
<td>Focuses well on the impact on the project’s target group</td>
<td>Poses the ethical problem of knowing you are excluding certain groups from development opportunities and yet using them to measure change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can help explain causal factors of the change</td>
<td>Ensuring the two groups are comparable is difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is in the same area so does not have the problem of location-related variation</td>
<td>Changing the project midway will distort findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6.3 Developing and Using Your Baseline

Given that it is possible to collect all kinds of information about a situation and that projects are not always clear about their detailed activities from the onset, how much time and effort should you invest in establishing a baseline? The M&E matrix (see 5.3) includes a specific step that asks you to decide whether a certain information need must have a baseline or not. Not all information requires a related baseline.

The most streamlined baseline studies are objective-driven – they only measure the status of focal aspects of the project. This means they are best if designed after the project logframe matrix has been revised. But, with a clear appraisal report, a project can start early on a baseline (see Box 5-18). Besides information related to your objective hierarchy, you will always need additional information about the context in order to be able to explain changes that you observe. If you have identified qualitative and quantitative information to answer the performance questions, then your baseline survey will include both types of information as well.

Box 5-18. Including qualitative information to balance numbers in Uganda

The baseline study for the DDSP programme in Uganda was completed before the start-up workshop and based on information needs identified in the appraisal report. The study was a quantitative survey complemented with a qualitative study in some of the same villages. The qualitative part of the baseline aimed to provide more detailed explanations for the results coming out of the quantitative survey to avoid misinterpretation of numbers due to inadequate understanding of village contexts. So the baseline survey provided the basis for good-quality impact assessment.

The baseline study was presented to key district stakeholders before and during the start-up workshop to seek additional insights and to decide how to incorporate the baseline into ongoing M&E work. There was a recommendation that some of the sites (where both qualitative and quantitative work had been undertaken) could continue as “sentinel sites” for the programme. In the qualitative survey sites, all the information documented by the villages and parishes was left with the local authorities as a basis for their own M&E baseline.

Keep in mind the following when developing your baseline:

1. Only collect what you are going to use. So you need to know what you will use. As a rule of thumb, only collect baseline information that relates directly to the performance questions and indicators that you have identified. Do not spend time collecting other information.

2. Plan baselines like you would any survey. As with any data collection and analysis process, you will need to plan for the following once you are clear what information you need to collect:
   - Find out what existing information you can use and check its quality.
   - Identify where you will find the information.
   - Decide on methods (see Annex D).
   - Decide what resources are needed.
   - Agree on responsibilities for data collection, analysis and use – and the timing of each of these moments.
   - Agree on when and how the baseline will be revised during the project life.
3. Keep it feasible. A baseline will never be perfect – it will always be a case of “good enough”. Better a small baseline that is used than an extensive one that collects dust on a shelf. The SDPMA project in Tanzania had not budgeted adequately for the follow-up to the baseline study. The M&E officer tried to follow up the baseline with a questionnaire but lacked the funds to conduct a field-based survey. Instead, he sent them out but, in the end, did not collect them or analyse them due to lack of money.

4. Be creative with methods. The methods for collecting monitoring data are the same as for baseline studies. In fact, they should be the same to make the data comparable. A standard method is a quantitative survey or PRA (participatory rural appraisal), but videos and photographs can also be used (see Box 5-19). In Venezuela, the PRODECOP project developed a participatory video baseline. Every time work started in a new community, the project team worked with local residents to create a video of their local livelihoods and living standards. Three years later, videos will be made of the same communities to show what has improved as a result of the project intervention. In China, the World Food Programme is using “before” and “after” photographs of housing to assess the impact of their food-for-work programmes among participants. See Section 6 and Annex D for more ideas on methods.

5. Don’t forget poverty and gender issues in the baseline study. The PADEMER project in Colombia undertook 302 surveys via implementing partners. The baseline study included a solid gender focus. It was not limited to sex-disaggregated basic information but also analysed differences between men and women in terms of, for example, the working day, time dedicated to rural microenterprises and differences in income and employment.

Box 5-19. Visual appraisals for comparison

The most important aspect of a baseline is using it. Otherwise it is a waste of time. To use baselines actively:

- know when you need to conduct the next round of data collection and who is responsible for it;
- budget adequately for all subsequent rounds of data collection you require to make regular comparisons;
- when a second dataset is available, plan a moment with those for whom the data are relevant to compare the information, analyse the findings and agree on corrective actions, if necessary.

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5.6.4. Alternatives to Standard Baseline Studies

Many projects find baselines difficult to undertake well and on time. Not surprisingly, the use of baselines is being increasingly questioned. A few alternatives to the standard survey approach to baselines are emerging.

1. First measurements as a starting point. One alternative is by indicating whether there is an improvement or a decline from the first measurement or in comparison to a desired condition, your target. In Brazil, an NGO-managed project is using the first year of monitoring data as its “baseline”. They simply cannot afford more detailed surveys.

2. Rolling baseline of profiles. This involves collecting baseline information to develop profiles not at once, but on a rolling basis as village organisations are formed, as credit groups start or as communities are taken up in the intervention strategy. The notion of a “rolling baseline” represents a middle-ground option between undertaking a comprehensive baseline and a totally retrospective impact-assessment approach. Note that information from this type of baseline may need to be complemented by general context information.

3. Optimal use of existing documentation. Yet others solve the baseline problem by working up a description of the original situation that does not require field data collection but is based on existing documentation (see Box 5-20).

Box 5-20. Unconventional approach to establishing a baseline for pastoral poverty reduction in Kenya

In north-east Kenya, the Wajir Pastoral Development Project began with a series of intensive participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercises with communities to determine the project goal and strategy. The project originally thought to collect baseline data against which all aspects of the project could then be assessed. But on reflection, management had several concerns: it would not be using pastoralists as information sources rather than stakeholders in the project, be biased towards quantitative data, fail to capture qualitative aspects and potentially undermine the participatory nature of the project. So instead, the project did the following:

• Integrated the initial PRA findings and those from subsequent PRA exercises, into a “background document” that included secondary data to put these perspectives within a broader context;
• With communities, developed several participatory systems to monitor different aspects of the project continuously;
• Conducted a participatory impact-assessment of key indicators identified by pastoralists themselves;
• Regularly monitored a sample of randomly selected households over a long period to understand changes in household situations and what could be attributed to project activities.

Although the project is not using a baseline study in the conventional sense, its M&E system included enough different ways of understanding development changes and to what extent they can be attributed to the project. Furthermore, the processes reinforced a sense of joint responsibility between the implementing organisation (OXFAM) and the pastoral associations for achieving the project objectives.
5.7 Updating Your Information Needs and Indicators

As with all aspects of the M&E system, update your information needs and indicators. You will need to update your information needs and indicators simply because a project evolves. The automated system of monitoring of the Cuchumatanes project in Guatemala has been updated several times by the M&E unit according to new information needs and new activities, reflected by new indicators. In Bangladesh, when reviewing and updating their M&E system, project management of the ADIP project identified the need for qualitative indicators to measure change in credit groups. The original indicators, such as “number of groups formed”, did not capture the maturity of the groups, which was indispensable information for identifying how the project could support the groups. Qualitative indicators needed to be identified with due consideration for the local context. These indicators were developed with the stakeholders.

Reassess indicators by simply asking, “Who is using (or going to use) the information?” If no one is using it, drop or change the indicator. If you notice important gaps, fill them by identifying what information you now need.

Updating is also necessary in the more participatory forms of M&E, since everyone is just beginning to learn about M&E as they implement it. At the beginning, few will know what makes a good indicator, what methods exist and are best, how often data should be collected and what kind of information is actually going to be useful.

In participatory projects, indicators will also change due to local differences and as groups evolve. An irrigation project in Zimbabwe works with a core set of indicators for all 36 irrigation schemes. This is supplemented by additional and more specific indicators for individual schemes, according to the judgement of the farmers and to the pace of development of the scheme.

By reviewing and adjusting your list of information needs and indicators, you will develop an increasingly relevant and viable M&E system.
Further Reading


Website on indicators: http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/. Note. This detailed Website focuses on indicators applicable in the North and on their use for assessing sustainability.

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Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

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Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
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Section 6

Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
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**Key Messages**

- When detailing the monitoring mechanisms, you will need to select methods not only for data gathering, but also for checking the data, sampling, recording, collating and analysing.
- Data about any performance question or indicator can be collected using more than one method, so list the options and assess their advantages and disadvantages before making a final choice.
- Check if your method is: feasible technically and financially, accurate (enough), consistent and insensitive to distortions.
- Remember to plan how you will collate and store data. These steps are often left out of the detailed planning of M&E.
- Analysis of M&E information occurs through critical reflection on what information means for the next steps of the project (see Section 8).
- Qualitative data analysis and quantitative data have different requirements. Qualitative data is iterative and not all that is observed and heard can be noted. Therefore qualitative data analysis should involve the data collectors.
- Communicating M&E findings – in appropriate ways to key audiences – is critical if the findings are to lead to improved project impact. Plan a clear communication strategy as part of the M&E system.

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**This Section is useful for:**

- M&E staff – to guide project implementers in deciding how to collect and communicate information and how to report M&E findings;
- Consultants – to support M&E staff in developing appropriate monitoring mechanisms and when reviewing and updating the M&E system.
6.1 An Overview of Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information

6.1.1 Knowing the Journey Data Will Take

Data travel. On this journey they are gradually collated and analysed as the data move from field sites or different project staff and partner organisations to be centrally available for management decisions and reports. The journey involves a transformation from data to information and knowledge that is the basis of decisions. Data are the raw material that has no meaning yet. Information involves adding meaning by synthesising and analysing it. Knowledge emerges when the information is related back to a concrete situation in order to establish explanations and lessons for decisions.

Many rural development projects have much data lying around, less information, little knowledge and hence very little use of the original data for decision making (see Box 6-1). To avoid this problem, plan not only how you will gather data but also how you will transform the data into valuable knowledge.

Box 6-1. Data and yet no information in Uganda

In one project in Uganda, field extension staff had kept monthly records for seven years on their work with farmers to establish sustainable livelihood activities, such as planting woodlots, beekeeping, using fuel-efficient stoves and implementing soil conservation measures. There was literally a room full of monthly reports. However, no system had been developed for collating this information and turning it into insights about adoption rates, reasons for differences between villages or differing success rates of particular extension staff. When analysis of the data was attempted, it proved to be impossible because the data was unreliable and very difficult to compare and collate between different project areas. This problem typically arises when the focus is on data collection rather than knowledge generation.

Figure 6-1 shows how data travel. Table 6-1 lists questions that need to be considered for each part of the journey. For each performance question and indicator, the journey will be different in terms of the choice of methods, frequency and responsibilities. Irrespective of the journey, be sure that the information you are collecting is helping you answer your performance questions (see Section 5).
Figure 6-1. The journey data take

Table 6-1. Preparing the journey for your data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Key Questions to Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data sample selection</td>
<td>Will a sample be necessary? If yes, how will it be taken in order to be representative of the project’s primary stakeholders? If no, where can you get the information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>How are you going to find your information: by measuring, interviewing individuals, group discussions, observing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data recording</td>
<td>Who will use which formats to write, visualise, photograph or take video of data and impressions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data storing</td>
<td>Where will data (raw and analysed) be stored, how and by whom? Who will have access?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collation</td>
<td>Who will use what methods to group data into a logically ordered overview?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Who will examine the data using what method to give them meaning and synthesise them into a coherent explanation of what happened and what needs to now be undertaken?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information feedback and dissemination</td>
<td>At what stages and using what means will information be shared with project and partner staff, primary stakeholders, steering committees and funding agencies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.2 Considerations When Choosing Your Method

Before choosing your method, be clear about three methodological aspects:

- the difference and overlap between methods for qualitative and quantitative information;
- the implications of working with individual or group-based methods;
- what makes a method participatory – or not.

Several steps need to be followed to select the most appropriate method(s) (see 6.2.2 for more details):

1. Check that you are completely clear about what information you need collected, collated, analysed or fed back, for which you are seeking a method.
2. Check that another group, person or organisation is not already collecting the data. Check, where possible, how the information was collected to see if it is reliable enough for your needs.
3. Be clear about how accurate you need to be.
4. Does the information relate to a specialist area? If so, seek specialist advice or documentation before proceeding with the method selection.
5. Be clear about the task that needs to be accomplished, and whether this concerns qualitative and/or quantitative information. Consider whether a method is needed to collect, collate, analyse, synthesise or disseminate information.
6. Decide the extent to which the data gathering or analysis process is to be participatory, and therefore whether you need to work with individuals, groups or a combination.
7. Decide if your data-collection coverage is to be sampled or comprehensive. If working with a sample, decide on your sample size, clarify the "sampling frame" and select your sample (see D.1).
8. Do you have several methodological options or is there only one? List your method options and make an initial selection. If using a sequence of methods, check that the methods complement each other.
9. List your methods and make an initial selection.
10. When you think you’ve got the right method for the task at hand, consider if it is feasible, appropriate, valid, reliable, relevant, sensitive, cost-effective and timely.
11. Pre-test your method, with a small number of participants who are similar to those from whom information is going to be sought. Adjust your method based on recommendations from the test run.
12. Determine the frequency of use.

6.1.3 Gathering, Collating and Storing Information

When preparing for data gathering, do not forget to:

- Consider carefully how to select interviewers and facilitators.
- Consider how to distribute the tasks of collection and analysis among different people and what is needed to limit errors.
- Ensure that those using the methods are comfortable with them.
• Ensure clarity of language.
• Prepare the practicalities of each method, such as materials needed.

Avoid error by considering possible causes of sampling errors and non-sampling errors. Non-sampling errors are particularly critical. These can occur due to interviewer bias, inadequacy of methods, processing errors and non-response bias (see 6.3.1).

Check your data from time to time. Spot checks are important at the beginning of any project - if you are using existing data sets - by looking at where data come from, who has collected information and the methods and standards they used. Also check data collection when using a new method or when working with new fieldworkers, new implementing partners, new staff, etc. Data can be suspicious if you notice overly precise data (like perfect matches between targets and actual realised activities), sudden large changes in data, and data gaps.

For each bit of information, define how it will be recorded. Practise with the people doing the recording before setting out to collect data.

The step of collating (or aggregating) information often gets lost in the gap between data collection and analysis. It requires some attention as it can greatly facilitate analysis if undertaken well and can introduce error if done poorly. Collation is needed when you are scaling up your information from a smaller unit of analysis to a larger one or when information has been collected from different sources with different methods. The collation of qualitative data requires special care and analytical skills.

Qualitative and quantitative data analysis are both critical for making use of M&E data but are also quite distinct processes. The Guide focuses on aspects of qualitative data analysis as statistical procedures fall outside its scope. Refer to Section 8 for many ideas on how to encourage reflective meetings and analytical reporting in addition to the ideas in 6.4.2.

When deciding how to organise the storage of M&E information, consider these four questions (also see 7.5):

1. What information needs to be stored?
2. Who needs access to the information and when?
3. What type of information needs to be stored - hard copies or data that can be computerised and accessed centrally?
4. Regularly assess what information you need to keep and what can be discarded.

6.1.4 Considering Communication of M&E Results

M&E-related findings have many potential audiences: funding agencies, steering committees, cooperating institution, project and implementing partner staff, and primary stakeholders. The main purpose of communicating findings is to ensure accountability and motivate stakeholders to action. Draft M&E findings need to be discussed with implementing partners and primary stakeholders in order to get feedback on accuracy, reach joint conclusions and agree on next steps. Final findings can then be passed to the relevant organisations for accountability and action.

Plan carefully how you will communicate your M&E findings. Reach agreement with project stakeholders on who needs to receive what kinds of M&E information. Remember to include accountability, advocacy and action-oriented audiences and to agree on the information (content and form) they need.
Plan for communication as part of your M&E system from the outset. Do not hope or expect that someone else in the project will communicate M&E findings. As part of this, invest in good communication, not only in producing effective outputs but also in project-based capacities for communication.

A key communication task is to ensure that your findings are correct. Workshops and meetings are critical events to seek feedback and plan action.

When planning to present M&E information for feedback, consider these practical aspects:

- Ensure clarity of message for specific audiences.
- Agree on the frequency for communicating information.
- Ensure timeliness. When do you need to get feedback to still be useful for decision making?
- Consider location. Where will people feel at ease?

Use different media to communicate findings. Written reporting is most known and ranges from formal progress reports, to special studies, to informal briefs in the form of memorandums highlighting a current issue. M&E findings can often be communicated more effectively verbally than by other means. Speaking directly with a target audience provides a quicker and more flexible way to convey your message. Also use visual displays, such as graphs or charts showing trends or maps, to convey summaries of what is happening.

### 6.2 Deciding Which Methods to Use

#### 6.2.1 What Are Methods?

A method is an established and systematic way of carrying out a particular task. Agronomists have methods for measuring crop yield. Economists have methods for calculating return on investment. Anthropologists have methods for looking at household decision-making patterns. Accountants have methods for budgeting and reporting on project funds. And managers and facilitators have methods for helping groups to make decisions.

M&E makes use of a wide range of methods for gathering, analysing, storing and presenting information. In your M&E activities, you are likely to use established research methods from the biophysical and social sciences, as well as from a growing collection of participatory methods (see Box 6-2). Sometimes the information you require will make it necessary to adapt an existing method or develop an entirely new method.

In carrying out M&E, it is often necessary to combine a series of methods (see Box 6-3). For example, a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) process used to find out how primary stakeholders are benefiting from a project might combine some 15 or more different methods ranging from transect walks to matrix ranking and focus group discussions. Likewise, a household survey or annual project review meeting would combine a series of interviewing, discussion and facilitation methods. The combination of a series of methods in a structured way is often referred to as a methodology. For example, you have a methodology for a workshop or a methodology for a baseline survey.
Box 6-2. Matching methods to needs

One IFAD-supported agricultural development project in China used crop development models to make predictions on the development of 14 crops, including the impact of staple and specialty crops - such as pearl sorghum and ginger - on farm-level production and income generation. These models were calculated with the help of the FARMOD modelling software developed by FAO and the World Bank. These estimates could be used as a base with which to compare actual results gathered through data-collection methods.

In India, a method for the self-evaluation of women's credit “self-help groups” was developed for periodic monitoring of specific indicators. Because many of the women are illiterate, a series of pictures was used to represent indicators and a colour-coding system was developed to represent levels of evaluation. This method was used in groups and allowed for full participation of all the members.

Box 6-3. Diverse methods for sustainability monitoring in the Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, India ¹

A village-based sustainability monitoring process was developed to understand what issues could potentially adversely affect the sustainability of water and sanitation services in India. A set of nine questionnaires was developed to be used in visits to 15 villages, with the following topics: village socio-economic profile; technical: water supply (asset condition and profile); technical: sanitation (drainage, soakpits and dustbins); technical: sanitation (household latrines); financial: costs, tariff, billing and collection; institutional: village water and sanitation committee (WWSC) – composition, functions and effectiveness; household: facts, perception of demand met; social: participation by women and poor; and tapstand monitoring.

Preparation and Data Collection

Before starting the data collection, a one-day preparatory workshop was held for the teams to brainstorm about the concept and the methods. A variety of methods were used in order to answer the questionnaires: direct observations, general meetings, focus group discussions, household surveys, and observations and interviews of villagers while collecting water at the public tap stands.

Collation and Analysis

After the fieldwork, all the data collected through the questionnaires and scores of the 71 indicators were converted into a sustainability index for each village. The analysis revealed that nine out of the 15 villages visited fell into the “likely to be sustainable” category (60% with a score above 0.65), five into the “uncertain” category (33% between 0.50 and 0.64) and one in the “unlikely” category (below 0.50).

6.2.2. Types of Methods

Annex D provides a description of 34 different methods commonly used for M&E and, in particular, participatory M&E. They have been grouped as follows:

- sampling methods;
- core M&E methods (such as stakeholder analysis and questionnaires);
- discussion methods for groups (such as brainstorming and role plays);
- methods for spatially-distributed information (such as maps and transects);
- methods for time-based patterns of change (such as diaries and photographs);
- methods for analysing relationships and linkages (such as impact flow diagrams and problem trees);
- methods for ranking and prioritising (such as matrices).

You will probably also need to draw on other specialised methods related to specific technical fields, which are clustered under biophysical measurements (Method 5) and cost-benefit analysis (Method 7) in Annex D. By calling on specific technical expertise when developing a detailed M&E plan, you can ensure the inclusion of appropriate specialist methods.

Before selecting your methods, first consider three important aspects:

- quantitative versus qualitative methods (see Table 6-2);
- individual versus group-based methods (see Table 6-2);
- the extent to which a method can be participatory.

### Table 6-2. Examples of multi-purpose M&E methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qualitative Data</th>
<th>Quantitative Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods for groups</td>
<td>Case studies, brainstorming, focus groups, SWOT, drama and role plays, maps, transects, GIS, historical trends/timelines, seasonal calendars, rich pictures, visioning, flow diagrams, well-being ranking</td>
<td>Nominal group technique, maps, transects, historical trends/timelines, seasonal calendars, flow diagrams, matrix scoring and ranking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for individuals</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews, case studies, maps, transects, diaries, historical trends/timelines, seasonal calendars, flow diagrams</td>
<td>Biophysical measurements, structured questionnaires, maps, transects, GIS, diaries, flow diagrams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

Quantitative methods directly measure the status or change of a specific variable, for example, changes in crop yield, kilometres of road built or hours women spend fetching water. Quantitative methods provide direct numerical results.

Qualitative methods gather information by asking people to explain what they have observed, do, believe or feel. The output from qualitative methods is textual descriptions.

Much information in M&E reports tends to be based on numbers. Quantitative data are clear and precise and are often considered to be more scientifically verifiable. You will always need this kind of information. However, for some performance questions you will need to complement it by asking people about their experiences and opinions.

Choosing to use a method to produce or analyse qualitative or quantitative data (see Box 6-4) depends not only on the type of information you are seeking but also on the capacities and resources you have available, how the information will be used and how precise data need to be (see Box 6-5).

Note that the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is not absolute. Much qualitative information can be quantified. For example, opinions can be clustered into groups and then counted, thereby becoming quantitative. Note, however, that you can never make quantitative information more qualitative. You cannot extract an opinion from a number.

### Box 6-4. Using methods to produce quantitative or qualitative data

- **Methods for quantitative data.** They need to produce data that are easily represented as numbers, answering questions such as “How much...?”, “How many...?”, and “How frequent ...?” Quantitative data generally require formal measurements of variables such as income, production or population densities.

- **Methods for qualitative data.** They produce data that are not easily summarised in numerical form, broadly answering the “how” and “why” through, for instance, meetings, interviews or general observations. Qualitative data are more appropriate for understanding people’s attitudes or behaviours, beliefs, opinions, experiences and priorities. Qualitative data include answers to questions like “Why do you think this happened?” and “How do you think this will affect you?”
Box 6-5. Considering the pros and cons of qualitative and quantitative studies

A study focusing on the community’s acceptability of immunisation was carried out in Somalia, as mothers did not seem to want to take their children to be immunised.

A quantitative survey could have found out: how many mothers accept immunisation, how many do not and whether this is related statistically to their socio-economic status, education, age, number of children, distance from the clinic, income, clan, etc. This information might be useful for programme planning if the social or physical factors that were found to influence the mothers could be changed.

However, a qualitative survey was used instead. It found out why mothers do or do not take their children to be immunised. It looked at their experience with immunisation and how that affects their behaviour. The study showed that the way mothers were treated in clinics put them off. For example, they were not given enough information and were scared when their children suffered from fevers after vaccination. They also thought that diseases were caused by bad spirits and, therefore, could not be prevented by vaccination.

From this study, it was possible to change the way clinics were run and how staff was trained, and it was easier to explain to mothers why immunisation is important.

Considering Individual- or Group-Based Methods

Throughout the M&E process – from design, to data collection and analysis – you can choose to use methods to consult with groups or with individuals (see Table 6-4). Working with individuals can give you more detailed information but it will only give an overview after analysing data from a set of individuals. A group-based method will elicit a more collective perspective – with areas of consensus and divergence – while personal details and perspectives are less likely to emerge. Groups ask more of the facilitator and the quality of discussions depends on the size of the group and how comfortable people are with each other and the topic at hand. Annex D includes one cluster of methods that are particularly suited for group discussions. However, many other methods in Annex D can also be used in a group context (see Table 6-2).

Table 6-4. Pros and cons of working with individuals and groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes with individuals</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage the discussion more easily</td>
<td>• Consume more time if you want data from many individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can get detailed information</td>
<td>• Cannot be used to generate consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generate data that can usually be structured in a way that makes statistical analysis possible</td>
<td>• Do not allow cost-effective feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes with a group</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generate new learning in some participants, as information may be shared that normally is not</td>
<td>• Can cause problems in terms of data validity, as individuals may be influenced by group dynamics or composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• With careful planning, can allow for marginal voices to be heard</td>
<td>• Cannot (usually) deal with sensitive information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can show where divergence and convergence of opinions lie</td>
<td>• Require a facilitator able to deal with group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Require careful thought about group composition to adequately represent the voices you want to hear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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What Makes a Method Participatory

Many projects are keen to involve primary stakeholders more in M&E. They commonly consider that collecting data from local people using so-called participatory methods is sufficient. Imagine the following scenario. The M&E staff of a project goes to a group of farms to understand if soil nutrient flows have changed as a result of farmer training on soil conservation. They meet the farmers and ask them to sketch maps showing where nutrients enter the farms, how they are used and how they leave, and in particular showing what has changed after soil conservation measures were adopted. The mapping process lasts about two hours, after which the team goes back to the M&E office with the sketched maps to synthesise and analyse the data for a report to the director. At some point, the report is copied and sent to the village. Can you call this mapping process participatory?

Participation in M&E is often limited to working with primary stakeholders as information sources, rather than as joint users of information and therefore potential analysts and co-designers of methods. If you have selected the method and use it to get information from people, then you are involved not in a participatory process but in an extractive one. This is fine – unless you are aiming for participatory M&E. In which case, you would involve other stakeholders in choosing and using methods.

Many people think there is a set of so-called “participatory” M&E methods, but this is not the case. A method is not inherently participatory or not participatory. Many of the methods useful for M&E can be used in either a participatory or non-participatory way. The participatory impact comes with the way a method is used and who helped select it. The use of a technical method for testing water quality, for example, can become participatory if the community is involved in deciding what aspects of water quality to measure, collecting the data and reviewing the results. On the other hand, if a group is directed to produce a map of the area, there is little discussion, and the map disappears into the project office forever, then this cannot be called participatory mapping. See 2.6 for general considerations for participatory M&E.

To ensure that the selection and use of methods is participatory, consider these questions.

1. In what aspect of the M&E methods is participation important? In selection or design of the method, in applying it for data collection or for analysis?

2. Who should ideally be involved in the task at hand? Who needs to help select, design or use the method? Ideally, those who are to use it for collecting or analysis should be involved in selection/design. This can include staff of implementing partners, project staff, primary stakeholders and consultants.

3. Who wants to be involved in what? Not everyone has the time or inclination to participate. This is not a problem, as full participation is neither practical nor possible. Instead, you need to ask those you would like to involve if they are able and interested.

4. What is needed for effective participation? Self-confidence is needed before effective participation is possible. Therefore you need to create the conditions for people to feel free in helping define methods, in testing and adjusting them, in collecting data, etc. This can include providing training or follow-up mentoring, finding the right time and place, offering childcare support, etc.
6.2.3 Selecting Your Methods

To select the most appropriate methods for the task at hand, the steps below can give some guidance.

1. Be clear about what you need to know. Section 5 discusses the process of deciding what you want to monitor and evaluate. Before you start with method selection, confirm with those involved that everyone is clear on what information needs to be sought.

2. Check that another group, person or organisation is not already collecting the data. Before investing in method selection for data gathering and analysis, find out if the information you are seeking is already available and from where (see Table 6.3). Government agencies, universities and research organisations will often have data that can contribute to the project’s information needs. Start by asking whether there are reporting mechanisms in the villages, local towns, district capitals, etc. for information you might need, such as population, disease incidence, tax collection and so on. The methods employed will be many and varied, ranging from national statistical and census methods to specific research methods. You might find it helpful to make an inventory of existing information collection, as in an IFAD-supported project in Zambia (see Table 6.3).

Check, where possible, how the information was collected to see if it is reliable enough for your needs. In some situations it may be possible to modify data gathering by other agencies to better support the M&E work of the project. However, if you think the data quality cannot be improved or if they are too difficult to access, then you will need to consider collecting the data yourself.

Table 6-3. Part of an inventory of information useful for the District Development Project that is already being compiled in Zambia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Information Collected</th>
<th>Who Collects?</th>
<th>Why Collect?</th>
<th>Where Does It Go After Collection?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water points</td>
<td>D-WASHE, water affairs, education, MoH (min. of health)</td>
<td>Planning for new water points and maintenance</td>
<td>Local authorities, NGOs, water affairs; UNICEF; MoH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road infrastructure</td>
<td>Roads department, local authorities, MAFF (min. of agriculture, food and fisheries)</td>
<td>Planning, e.g., access and maintenance</td>
<td>MoLGandH (min. of local government and housing); MAFF, MoT (min. of tourism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>CBS (central bureau of statistics), local authorities, sector departments</td>
<td>Planning for services provision; Planning for new investment</td>
<td>MoLGandH, sector departments/ministries, donors, MoFED (min. of finance and economic development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop production</td>
<td>MAFF, CBS</td>
<td>Food security; Input requirements; Policy formulation; Marketing; Crop production potential; Household income</td>
<td>MAFF, MoFED, CBS, FRA (food reserve agency), local authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment (schools)</td>
<td>Head teachers, CBS, inspectors (district), zone coordinators</td>
<td>Planning purposes, e.g., upgrading, expansion, materials procurement</td>
<td>MoE, curriculum development centre, MoH, local authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births and deaths</td>
<td>Local authorities, hospitals, CBS</td>
<td>Birth and mortality rates; Population growth rate; Planning, e.g., provision of social services</td>
<td>Registrar general, MoFED, CBS, MoH, MoLGandH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Be clear about how accurate you need to be. Higher accuracy is always more desirable than lower accuracy. However, in some cases you may not need precise figures or detailed opinions based on a representative sample, but only a general impression. For example, you can choose to do a series of 50 measurements on farmers’ fields to measure exact productivity. But you might only need to know if most farmers are satisfied with their yields, for which discussion with several farmer leaders might be sufficient.

4. Does the information relate to a specialist area? If so, seek specialist advice or detailed documentation before proceeding with the method selection. This is the case, for example, for cost-benefit analysis and geographic information system mapping (see Methods 7 and 19 in Annex D). They require expert input in order to assess if they are worthwhile for the project to use.

5. Be clear about the task that needs to be accomplished and whether it concerns qualitative and/or quantitative information. Consider whether a method is needed to collect, collate, analyse, synthesise or disseminate information. Does the performance question or indicator for which you are seeking a method require quantitative, qualitative or both types of information? Think about whether you need individual or group opinions. Also consider how the people involved prefer and are able to communicate, as this determines the choice of medium: written, oral, visual and/or dramatic. Some methods are based on diagrams, while others focus on written information.

6. Decide the extent to which the data gathering or analysis process is to be participatory and, therefore, whether you need to work with individuals, groups or a combination. Different stakeholders can be involved in data gathering and analysis of information to varying degrees. Be clear about why you are seeking more participation (see Box 6-6). Is it for consistency in processing or for shared analysis? This will affect the choice of method. The extent of participation will also influence the suitability of certain methods. For example, a cost-benefit analysis is not suited for just anyone, but for someone with an economic background. If you are developing an M&E system that micro-credit groups are to implement and manage, then questionnaires will only be suitable if they design this themselves and are confident about analysing the results.

Box 6-6. When participatory M&E is the incentive needed to keep the data journey moving

In many CARE offices, there is often a physical and temporal gap between data collection and data analysis. Those collecting data are often not involved in analysing them. Analysis often happens months after the data are collected. Often data are not analysed at all. One M&E staff member in CARE joked that when he started his job, there was a huge container of paper outside his office that one day simply disappeared. He was indicating that unanalysed data can easily disappear without being missed.

In Bangladesh, CARE project staff tried to meet this challenge by introducing participatory methods into their project monitoring systems. Shifting their monitoring activities from CARE headquarters to the field level grew out of concern that data analysis was not done by those who collected the information nor who were involved in the day-to-day running of the project. Also, it took so long for headquarters-based staff to receive monitoring forms, enter data, send forms back to the field for corrections and so on that data processing sometimes took over a year.

More participatory M&E was introduced to:
1. Increase the validity of monitoring data by having field trainers and project participants involved in analysis;
2. Increase the quality of data by helping participants become aware of why they are being asked certain questions.

One project team has now prepared forms that are one-page pictorial summaries of production and input data, which will be used with farmers. This data will then be entered and analysed at the “thana” and district levels. Composite reports will then be sent to headquarters, where they will be compiled and analysed for the project as a whole.

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7. Decide if your data collection coverage is to be sampled or comprehensive. If working with a sample, decide upon your sample size and then choose an appropriate sampling method. It is often not possible to gather data from the entire population that interests you. Instead, a sample will be needed if the population is too large, time is limited or you face resource and capacity constraints. Select your sample well, as it affects which methods are appropriate and feasible, and will affect the validity of your findings.

- Decide on your sample size. The optimal size of your sample has little to do with the size of the population you are studying. Other factors are more important, such as the available budget, number of subgroups to be analysed and time available. See D.1 for more details.

- Clarify the “sampling frame”. This refers to a description of the set of all possible individuals you could sample. See D.1 for more details.

- Select your sample. You have two options (see Methods 1 and 2 in Annex D). Random sampling methods give every individual in a population an equal chance of being selected. Non-random sampling methods involve a more deliberate selection within a population, particularly when a certain kind of opinion or comparison is needed. Or you can combine these two options (see Box 6-7).

Box 6-7. Random sampling within a non-random sample

In a total of nine villages, nine to ten households were selected randomly from four different income categories from each village. The nine villages consisted of three villages from clusters in three different geographical areas. In each cluster, villages were selected on the basis of the length of the project in the area (i.e., one, three or five years). This sampling allowed for two types of comparisons to be made. A comparison was made based on the length of the project’s presence in the village and one was made across clusters (geographical/topographical conditions).

8. Do you have several methodological options or is there only one? Armed with all these details about how you hope to find information, ask yourselves if you actually have any options. Sometimes the type of information you are seeking can be found clearly only in one way. For example, knowing how many turtles have laid eggs on breeding beaches will require you to go and look. However, it is more likely that you will have several options.

9. List your method options and make an initial selection. Once you know what the method needs to do, then it is time to list all options and choose. Table 6-5 provides one way to help you organise your thinking for this step.

Table 6-5. Helping you match methods for performance questions and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Question / Indicator</th>
<th>Issues in Gathering Data</th>
<th>Potential Methods</th>
<th>Comments on Possible Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take this from your M&amp;E matrix (see Section 5 and Annex C).</td>
<td>Coverage, degree of participation, qualitative, quantitative, who is to do it, etc.</td>
<td>See Annex D.</td>
<td>List particular potential problems and key advantages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of your method will depend largely on the type of information needed, the skills of those involved and the degree of precision needed. Also make sure that methods complement each other to provide the information you are seeking and that they allow you to crosscheck information. For example, a forestry resource management plan may involve GIS maps.
(Method 19), resource mapping (Method 17) and transects (Method 18) to gather information on the forest resources, an analysis of historical trends to understand changes in forest use and ownership, an institutional analysis diagram (Method 27) to help with stakeholder analysis and various discussion methods (Methods 11 to 16) to understand local priorities and dynamics.

Critical in your selection process is ensuring appropriateness. Table 6-6 provides an example of the appropriateness of different soil-erosion assessment methods for different audiences. Especially in the case of participatory monitoring, methods should be selected so they can eventually be incorporated into everyone's everyday activities, as few people are likely to be remunerated for the effort involved. Methods might need to be created after negotiations about appropriateness (see Box 6-8). Where possible, the information collection, analysis and the use of the results should be undertaken by the same people, who should understand the method(s) and agree that they are appropriate.

Table 6-6. Appropriateness of soil-erosion assessment methods for different stakeholder groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Policy Maker</th>
<th>Funding Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual (rills, turbidity of run-off water, etc.)</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick in the ground</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total suspended solid</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-off plots</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair - Good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil horizon</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation/Pedestal formation</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation/Modelling</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good - Excellent</td>
<td>Good - Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote sensing</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good - Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sediment deposition</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 6-8. Negotiating appropriate methods in Brazil

In Brazil, the farmers, NGO staff, union representatives and university academics were deciding which method could assess “the percentage of vegetation cover” (one of the chosen indicators for monitoring their agroforestry activity). First, the academics suggested using a wooden frame (with four quadrats of about one square metre in total), to be placed on the ground in several sites within the agroforestry plot and visually estimating the surface area covered by vegetation. They also suggested a form to fill in the percentages. While the wooden frame was acceptable, the farmers thought the form would be too complicated. The academics then suggested a form with pre-drawn quadrats that the farmer could shade to depict the area under vegetation. Again, it was rejected as too alien to the farmers’ way of registering, as they are reluctant to use pen and paper. Finally, they all agreed on the use of wooden sticks or rulers, on which the farmer scratches a mark to indicate the estimated percentage of vegetation cover in terms of a certain segment of the ruler. Each farmer uses a new stick for each measuring event. When the farmers meet for the agroforestry project, they bring their rulers, register the measurements on paper, and discuss the findings and the significance for their plots.

Scientists might well debate the accuracy of a scratch mark on a wooden stick compared with written percentages on a piece of paper. However, if the paper-based method had been imposed, the reliability of the information would probably have been low because the farmers were reluctant to use this approach. In this case, participation probably ensured a more realistic version of “rigorous” data collection.

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10. Use this checklist to see if you have the right method for the task at hand.8

- **Feasibility.** Do you have the right skills and equipment for the method? Can the method realistically help cover the intended questions/indicators? Do you have enough time? Can you cover the geographic area adequately? What is the distance between participants and what are the language requirements? Are sufficient technical support and training provided?

- **Appropriateness.** Does the method suit the conditions of the project? Does everyone involved agree that the method is appropriate and do they understand it? Is the unit of analysis appropriate for the method?

- **Validity.** Do the people who are to use the information believe the method is valid, i.e., able to assess the desired indicator with enough accuracy?

- **Reliability.** Will the method work when needed? Is the error that will occur acceptable? Are you using different methods to verify the information collected, rather than using only one particular method so risking distorted information?

- **Relevance.** Does the method produce the information required or is it actually assessing something similar but, in fact, basically different? Does the method complement the basic philosophy and approach of the project?

- **Sensitivity.** Is it able to pick up data variations sufficiently? Can it be adapted to changing conditions without excessive loss of reliability?

- **Cost effectiveness.** Have sufficient financial resources been allocated? Will the method produce useful information at relatively low cost – or is there a cheaper alternative that provides information that is good enough?

- **Timeliness.** Is there an acceptable level of delay between information collection, analysis and use? Do the methods use the least amount of time possible outside of everyday work? Have you looked for ways to incorporate the use of the methods into other daily tasks?

11. Pre-test your method. You should pre-test all M&E methods to make sure they are feasible and will give you the desired kind of information. Pre-testing is particularly critical prior to a major data-gathering exercise. It involves a trial run with a small number of participants who are similar to those from whom information is to be sought. Check that the questions are clear and see how long the method takes per person or group. Adjust your method based on the outcome of the test run. You might need to organise additional training if the method seems to require more skills than those possessed by the people who are to use it.

12. Determine the frequency of use. Monitoring implies repeated use of a method to make comparisons, for example, returning to a map (Method 17) every six months to update the information or holding a focus group (Method 12) to see if views have changed. Methods need to be consistently applied at each monitoring moment so that information is not distorted, comparisons are possible and findings are reliable.

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6.3 Gathering Data from the Field

6.3.1 Preparing and Planning for Data Collection

After selecting and pre-testing the method – but before starting the data collection – you will need to make the final preparations. Consider what you might need to do to limit common problems in the field.

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Consider carefully how to select interviewers and facilitators. Two types of fieldworkers will be needed: interviewers to collect data and facilitators to conduct group-based discussions and analysis. Interviewing and facilitating are two sets of complementary skills. Consider whether the following factors may influence the quality of interviews and discussions: age, gender, background and position in the community, educational level, socio-economic level, personality and attitude, physical health, language, religion and cultural customs. These factors may impair or enhance an interviewer or facilitator's capacity to understand certain topics or be acceptable to whomever he/she is meeting. Select those people who fit best with the task at hand and the stakeholders with whom they will interact.

Consider how to distribute the tasks of collection and analysis among different people and what is needed to limit errors. The number of people involved in each stage of the data journey will affect the consistency and accuracy of data. The greater the number of people involved, not only the more organisation is needed but also the greater the risk of data inaccuracies and inconsistencies. Plan how you will ensure that fieldworkers achieve consistent quality of data collection/facilitation and how data will be verified (see 6.3.2).

Ensure that those using the methods are comfortable with them. Each method should be pre-tested and practised by individuals who are to apply them. Facilitation techniques need to be mastered by those who will interact with stakeholders to collect and analyse information. This means understanding and practising facilitation techniques but also having the skills to design methods jointly with stakeholders. A training session on methods needs to cover the purpose of each method and of data collection and analysis, improve the specific skills for working with groups and doing good interviewing, and teach ways to record information.

Ensure clarity of language. Ideally, field workers either speak the relevant language or are accompanied by a trusted interpreter. If working through translation, spend time getting the translations right with native speakers and, if possible, train the translators in the selected M&E methods. A list of clear translations needs to be prepared before the fieldwork starts. One way of ensuring that an unusual method, such as matrix scoring (Method 32, Annex D), is translated correctly is by having one native speaker translate it and then asking another person to translate it back to the original language. Then the two versions can be discussed with the data-collectors to be sure they understand and can comment upon the nuances involved.

Prepare each method. Each method will require its own preparations (see Box 6-9). Be sure to organise materials, including sufficient backups of the measuring and recording instruments (pencils or pens for filling in forms or questionnaires, notebooks in which to write, markers for flip charts, batteries for a laptop computer or tape recorder, etc.). Carefully plan the formats needed to record information (see 6.3.3).

**Box 6-9. Examples of methods and their preparation**

- **Questionnaire/Survey**: checking of forms by a professional to be sure that questions are unbiased and formulated properly, enumerator training to ensure they understand the questions and record accurately, availability of enough copies of the questionnaire, provision of several writing instruments (and tape recorder if necessary).
- **Biophysical measurement**: forms for recording, training in the accurate use of the measuring instrument, spare instruments and spare parts if budget allows.
- **Role plays**: effective training for good facilitation and drawing conclusions together with participants, (video) camera, notebook, flip chart, tape recorder, pens.
- **Sketch mapping, flow diagrams, matrices**: training on facilitation and explanation of its purpose, (extra) paper, coloured pens, notebook for own notes.
- **Discussion methods**: training in facilitation techniques, flip chart(s) and coloured pens, notebook.
6.3.2 Ensuring Reliability of Information

Reliability of information is about consistency. To increase the reliability of information, stop to consider possible causes of inconsistency. Errors creep into the system when, for example, field staff document answers inaccurately, selected respondents are not the best information sources, field staff are unclear about the purpose of information gathering, etc. Two basic types of data errors are “sampling errors” and “non-sampling errors”.

A sampling error occurs when you have chosen the wrong sample (see 6.2.3 and D.1, Annex D). It is the difference between an estimate derived from a sample survey and the value that would result if a census of the whole population were taken. For example, if a sample has a response rate of 30%, the sample error estimates how accurately the sample has estimated the 30% of the population that it supposedly represents. Sampling errors arise when the information you have collected does not accurately represent the target population. Casley and Kumar (1988: 81) list the types of households that could be missed when compiling a sample, resulting in data biases: remote or inaccessible households, those with frequently absent members (e.g., migrant labourers), newly created single-person households and ethnic minorities (as they are often marginalised within a village). See D1 for information on how to select a sample. Sampling errors do not occur in a census, for example if you ask all the micro-credit groups the same questions. Because you have involved all of them, you will only have non-sampling errors.

The most common and diverse types of errors are the non-sampling errors. Knowing the possible causes of systematic non-sampling errors can help you limit the error.

- **Interviewer bias.** An interviewer can unfairly influence the way a respondent answers questions. This may occur if the interviewer or facilitator is too friendly, aloof or prompts the respondent. Fieldworkers need to have adequate capacities but also the right incentives. This can also be caused by a management culture that discourages the reporting of problems such as low levels of implementation (see Section 7 for more on incentives).

- **Inadequate methods.** Causes include: complicated collection procedures, inappropriate formats, ambiguous questions, mismatch of questions and method, etc.

- **Processing errors.** These can arise through miscoding, incorrect data entry, incorrect computer programming and inadequate checking.

- **Non-response bias.** If a significant number of people do not respond to a certain question, then results may be biased because the characteristics of non-respondents may differ from those who have responded. Some questions may be difficult to understand for certain people.

Non-sampling error can occur at any stage of a sample survey or census, and unlike sampling error, it is not generally easy to measure. The non-sampling errors are difficult to measure due to the diversity of sources (the interviewers, respondents, coders, data entry operator, etc.).

Information inaccuracies can have more than one source of error. For example, in a micro-credit project in India, the implementing partners felt that data collected were inaccurate due in part to a burdensome and cumbersome process. The NGOs also questioned the capacity level of local groups to fill out the lengthy monitoring formats accurately. Furthermore, there was very high turnover of grassroots workers, primarily due to very low salaries paid under the programme, so consistency of data collection was bound to suffer. The NGOs feared that if primary data were not accurate, then errors would multiply as the information from the different groups and staff was collated into larger figures, leading to a false picture of the progress and impact.
Avoiding Non-Sampling Errors During Data Collection

Many sources of non-sampling error can be avoided or minimised. Table 6-7 lists some actions you can take to reduce the most common types of errors.

Table 6-7. Common errors during data collection and how to reduce them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Errors</th>
<th>Ways to Avoid Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer bias</td>
<td>• Make sure everyone understands the purpose of each method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make sure everyone knows exactly what data she/he is collecting – clarify units, whom to speak with or where to go for data, and the frequency of collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Practise interviewing and facilitation techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Brainstorm about possible problems that might occur and agree on various ways to avoid them or deal with them should they occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing errors caused by poor documentation of data</td>
<td>• Standardise formats for documentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Practise formats with the users and adapt the formats if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Computerise as soon as possible after data collection and check the data entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have enough material to record all responses and avoid losing data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-response bias</td>
<td>• Pre-test questions and methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Present methods and questions (and especially their purpose) clearly and confirm that people have understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use local terms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verifying the Data Once You Have Them

Data must, from time to time, be verified. Only by checking whether your data make sense and are valid can you feel safe that you are analysing progress and process based on correct inputs. You do not have to check data all the time. Keep your data verification process efficient by undertaking spot checks at key moments:

- at the beginning of any project – if you are using existing data sets – by looking at where data come from, who has collected information and the methods and standards they used;
- when using a new method;
- when targets and data match perfectly;
- when working with new fieldworkers, new implementing partners, new staff, etc.

When all goes too smoothly with data collection, then probe to see if there really are no problems lurking underneath the surface. Problems are inevitable and their absence may signal that problems are suppressed. Keep an eye out for signs of problematic data and investigate where problems might be occurring.

- Overly accurate data. When the data collected match targets too perfectly the data are probably problematic. In one IFAD-supported project in Asia, large variations emerged in reporting per county. Most counties consider the targets written in the appraisal report as compulsory and strive to achieve them. They only report when achievements are close to 100% of the targets. For instance, in two counties, the 1996 performance records a 100% achievement for practically all activities. In another project, a review in 2001 of the data on physical progress showed that targets and actual figures of implementation were exactly the same, every month, for every parameter. These are clear cases of unreliable data.
Sudden, large changes in data. In northeast Brazil, an NGO was monitoring the adoption rates of contour ploughing and noticed a huge increase in adoption rates. The NGO knew it had not undertaken much training with farmers on contour ploughing so doubted the data. Focused research was undertaken in several communities to see if the data were accurate. It turned out that the data were, in fact, accurate but that adoption to contour planting had been triggered by a surge in animal traction. Animals cannot plough up and down steep slopes so contour ploughing had become the side effect of increased use of animal traction. 9

Gaps in the data. When certain information has many non-respondents, this may point to a respondent error or an error in the choice of method for that information.

Options for Verifying Data

Every project needs to find its own way to incorporate verification into its data-collection process. In Yemen, the RADP project deals with data verification when management senses a problem with the data collected by component departments and sent via the M&E unit. Management forms a committee from the department concerned and the M&E unit to verify the information. The department concerned may also make a field visit and submit a report directly to the project director and copies to the M&E unit.

Other projects outsource data verification. In the ADIP project in Bangladesh, the reliability and validity of data are crosschecked using additional data-collection exercises. This includes, for example, the evaluation of demonstration plot performance and research activities by consultants. The responsible governmental department verifies M&E data, but project management decides when such verification will happen and who should carry it out. In the APPTDP project (India), the primary data are collected through village liaison workers. Data are then verified by an appointed agricultural/development consultant. Only then are the verified data passed to the central monitoring unit for analysis.

To check data yourself, triangulation is an important principle. This means collecting the same type of information but from different sources and using different methods. This can be as simple as, for example, asking the same questions with different focus groups or comparing the outputs of a map and a transect of the same area.

Verifying quantitative data is often more straightforward, as more agreed standards exist. For example, many types of biophysical measurements indicate how to calculate whether the data are representative. Verifying qualitative data is more difficult, as there are no clear rules. You can use techniques like “key judges” to verify the interpretation of information (see Box 6-10).

Box 6-10. Using different methods and “key judges” to verify qualitative information in the Philippines 10

In the Philippines, the NGO, Education for Life Foundation (ELF), evaluated its leadership-training programme. Various methods were used to gather data, including focus groups (Method 12, Annex D), story-telling, direct observation (Method 6, Annex D), psychological assessments, surveys (Method 8, Annex D) and semi-structured interviews (Method 9, Annex D). As the information was mostly qualitative and open-ended, the field researchers developed the idea of “key judges” to cluster the information for analysis. They clustered and labelled data according to topics they had selected earlier. Consensus was needed by at least three people before labelling the data. The process of data analysis allowed the researchers to share their different interpretations of the answers and so it triangulated findings. As a final check, they presented the draft findings to the communities where data had been collected and they asked for feedback and suggestions.


6.3.3. Recording Data

Besides knowing how to conduct interviews and facilitate discussions, fieldworkers need to know how to record responses. Data can be recorded in many ways, depending in large part on the data collection method. Some methods require the filling in of forms or tables, others require using a tape recorder, video recorder or camera, writing answers on cards or flip-charts, or taking detailed notes.

For each bit of information, define how it will be recorded. Practise with the people doing the recording before setting out to collect data.

Whichever data-recording method you choose, make sure you are consistent in how you record or it will be difficult to compare and analyse the data. Also consider the information storage implications (see 6.4.4 for more details). Where and how will data be stored so that they are safe and accessible? This will affect how data are recorded. Box 6-11 describes one example of the daily recording of information that can then be fed into reports on the progress of the project.

Box 6-11. Zimbabwean farmers record their day-to-day observations

In one IFAD-supported project in Zimbabwe, farmers are asked to keep daily records as part of the M&E system. The information they record includes: production trends, gross margin budgets, cropping programme (rotation), marketing trends (consumer consumption and price comparisons), water usage per crop/plot, fertiliser use, pest spraying programmes, scouting of pests and diseases, harvesting outputs, labour costs and rainfall records. These records are then compiled by the extension agent and submitted to the district agricultural office for analysis. This provides monitoring information on the scheme’s progress and is used to feed quarterly reviews and annual work plans at the irrigation-scheme level. With systems like this, it is paramount that farmers be supported to keep records accurately and that data be verified regularly. Farmers will only be able to sustain such high levels of information recording if it is meaningful for them as well.

A good form helps the recorder enter data consistently. It should clearly represent the selected M&E indicators (as words, as diagrams or symbols, or reformulated as a question) and give sufficient space for the collector to fill in the information. Data forms should include space at least for:

- date, location, time and duration of interview or discussion;
- name of enumerator/facilitator;
- name of participants;
- topic(s) being discussed and methods used;
- key findings – either in a predefined format (see Box 6-12) or in terms of key words and descriptions if the data gathering method is open ended.

Box 6-12. Different options for predefined answer formats

- Checklist: when the answer requires ticking one or more options from a list (e.g., “Which health services do you use?”).
- Two-way questions: when the answer is “yes” or “no”, “agree” or “disagree”.
- Multiple-choice questions: when there are several possible answers and you want the respondent to consider all the possible answers before replying.
- Scales: when you are asking people to give or rank their opinion. Ordered scales are where people mark the statement with which they agree and leave the others. An agreement scale requires respondents to show the extent to which they agree with a statement, for example, from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

11 Feuerstein, M. T. 1986, 95-102, see Further Reading.
When diagrams form the basis of discussion (see D.4, D.5, D.6 and D.7), extra care is needed to make additional notes since the diagram itself will never capture all the important opinions and conclusions.

Who designs the recording form is critical, particularly if monitoring is to be carried out by local groups. For example, self-help groups in a credit project in India have developed a coding system to ensure that all their members can participate in their regular self-evaluation process. Since many members are illiterate, the questions are symbolised with pictures and the three levels of evaluation are colour-coded. This is an example of an agreement scale (see Box 6-12).

6.4 Collating, Analysing and Storing Information

Once data have been collected, they need to be organised into a manageable form ready to be analysed efficiently. This involves transcribing data into a systematic format, entering the information obtained from each respondent or group and organising it into one overall format, for instance, into a computer database.

6.4.1. How to Collate Information

Collation of information is needed when:

- you are scaling up your information from a smaller unit of analysis to a larger one, for example, compiling all individual interviews to develop an overview of a micro-credit group or pulling together all village-level information into a district-level analysis;

- information has been collected from different sources with different methods, to lay the basis for making comparisons and finding patterns during analysis.

Collation of information requires an appropriate format. With some methods, this is a very straightforward process. It can simply involve filling in a statistical programme on the computer with numbers that represent measurements or it can entail entering numbers that are pre-identified codes representing specific ideas, following the form, questionnaire or notes used in the data collection process. With statistical data, compilation ensures that the many data are reduced to clearly labelled tables. These tables should integrate the findings according to your performance question. For example, it should show location-specific trends if you are trying to understand how impact varies per community or district.

The collation of qualitative data requires special care and analytical skills (see Box 6-13). Box 6-14 describes the basic steps to order open-ended responses. Section 6.4.2 discusses this in more detail, since data collation and data analysis with qualitative data are overlapping processes.

Box 6-13. Gaining confidence with qualitative reporting

Staff from an IFAD-supported project in Indonesia are comfortable with monitoring progress on physical, quantifiable indicators. They are also confident that NGO partners working as implementing agencies can use qualitative methods well enough for monitoring purposes. However, they are unsure about how to report on information from qualitative data – and on how to integrate it with physical progress monitoring. This is understandable. It is often easier to fill pre-determined forms requiring pre-determined information. This can be supplemented by getting M&E and field staff to make regular descriptive reports on their impressions from field visits. Initially, staff can write short impressions of one or two pages. Once practised, staff can focus their narrative reports on special aspects, such as poverty alleviation, food security or gender.
Box 6-14. How to synthesise and collate open-response information

1. Produce a short summary of what each person says, including his/her main points.
2. Look over the responses. Once you are about a quarter of the way through, note the points most frequently mentioned. Then read all the responses and record how many have responded to each of these main points. Alternatively, divide the responses into those for or against a certain issue, or divide them to show various degrees of enthusiasm about an issue.
3. Identify any important quotes to emphasise certain points.
4. Ask other people to look through the responses to prevent your own biases taking over the way you interpret responses.
5. Number each respondent. Then, following point 2, number each main point so that you can code the responses (who has noted a main point) and analyse the information numerically, if needed.

6.4.2 Why Analyse M&E Information

Analysing M&E findings requires looking closely at the information (ideas, facts, impressions), clarifying and structuring it, understanding connections and identifying core elements, in order to arrive at conclusions that can lead to action. Analysing M&E findings has several functions:

• to refine understanding – by discussing initial information with project stakeholders, more refined insights can emerge;

• to limit biases – ensuring a thorough discussion about information means that this is cross-checked and people can point out when they feel an issue has been represented incorrectly;

• to build a clear picture of a situation/event/process and reach consensus – by discussing data, contradictions and gaps can be identified and can be understood or filled;

• in participatory M&E, joint analysis can strengthen ownership of the conclusions and motivate people to invest more in making changes happen.

Analysis of M&E information and critical reflection are closely related, so please refer to Section 8 for many ideas on how to encourage reflective meetings and analytical reporting.

Consider who needs to be involved in analysis. The question of who is making sense of the data is central to participatory analysis. Often, work that may initially have been very participatory can shift towards analysis only by project staff. Sometimes this is necessary, as some aspects of analysis and synthesis can be excessively tedious or time-consuming for primary stakeholders. Shared analysis can make all the difference between a superficial descriptive report or simplistic feedback session and analysis based on shared understanding that motivates people to action, whether they are villagers, policy makers or technical staff.

Consider how you will undertake analysis. Choosing a method for analysis depends on various factors, including whether it will be a participatory process, the tool you use to collate and analyse the data (e.g., a computer), and the type of information that is being collected. For instance, if it is qualitative information, analysis will involve looking for patterns in descriptions and explanations of patterns (see 6.4.3). For quantitative data, the analysis will follow statistical procedures and show trends in terms of percentages or ratios. In both cases, analysis will involve comparing planned results with actual ones to understand the reasons for differences, to compare differences over geographic ranges or between groups, or simply to monitor changes over time.

Many of the methods in Annex D can be used for data analysis. For instance, if you should choose more participatory processes, see D.3 on discussion methods for more ideas. D.6 on analysing relationships and linkages and D.7 for ranking and prioritising are also useful.
6.4.3 Analysing Quantitative and Qualitative Data\textsuperscript{12}

The analysis of quantitative data is often better known in projects than that of qualitative data. Quantitative data analysis often - but not exclusively - encompasses calculations, such as total and average numbers of activities implemented or percentages as compared to plans or targets. More elaborate statistical analysis may also be required, for example with cost-benefit analysis (see Annex D). Discussing the specific procedures of statistical analysis lies beyond the scope of this Guide, so the focus here is on ways to deal with qualitative information.

The analysis of qualitative information is very different and can be more difficult than that of quantitative data for those who are not used to dealing with opinions and non-standard answers. Through content analysis of collected information, conclusions can be formulated for each of the performance questions or indicators. The analysis process involves identifying the categories of responses found in the raw data.

Involving the data collectors in analysis. All M&E data collectors and facilitators - whether they are project staff, implementing partner staff or primary stakeholders - should participate in sessions to analyse qualitative data. Because of the nature of qualitative data, it is critical that those who were present when the data were gathered also participate in analysis. Much happens in open-ended discussions that is observed by facilitators and helps to explain the data.

Collect and analyse qualitative data concurrently. Qualitative data collection is intended to trigger an iterative learning process. This means that information from one discussion or interview will indicate aspects of the topic that you will need to pursue with other questions and methods. So analysis of one set of interview data may indicate changes needed in subsequent interviews or discussions. A second reason for immediate analysis of information is that it is impossible to note everything that is said in open-ended discussions. Additional information, such as about the group dynamics and how they influenced what was said, will not be recorded but are critical to interpreting information. So the sooner the analysis takes place, the easier it is to remember aspects that were not noted.

Structure analysis around each performance question and each category of interviewees. For example, if M&E field staff conducted individual interviews with two farmer leaders and with the village council (VC) in one day, then the two sets of data (farmers and VCs) would be analysed separately. During the analysis, the team may need to refer back to the performance questions to clarify the objectives of the different discussions.

Follow these five steps to analyse the data.

- Re-read the interview questions to the group. This allows everyone to remember the focus of the M&E work.
- The note-taker(s) read aloud the responses for each question. If there is more than one set of notes, each set of notes should be read.
- Discuss the responses and share other comments that may not have been written down, to clarify exactly what the interviewees were saying.
- Cluster the responses and summarise findings. Together, identify the categories of responses in collected information and summarise the findings concisely. The summary should indicate the trends in the information in terms of whether the attitudes or ideas expressed were shared by all interviewees, the majority, half, a minority or only a few. Although you cannot quantify the different types of answers, do report trends.
- Identify unclear or missing information. Determine whether there is missing or unclear information that should be investigated in subsequent M&E work.

\textsuperscript{12} Based on Aubel, J. 2000, see Further Reading.
6.4.4 Storing M&E Information

Documenting information is critical for M&E, providing the basis for communication, transparency, consensus building and continuity of consultative processes. Stored information serves as the source of institutional memory turned to by newcomers and when verification or comparison with the past is needed. The quantity of information that all projects collect and share calls for information systems to store data and make them accessible to others. Consider four questions when planning the storage of information (also see 7.5).

1. What information needs to be stored?

Think about what information and how much you need to store. Information storage is needed at two levels: to guide the project strategy and for tracking operations. In principle, everything you decide to monitor and evaluate will need to be stored in some way. Information about progress with implementation, stakeholder reviews, annual project reviews, primary stakeholder databases, changes in the context, causes, unexpected impacts, minutes of meetings... the list quickly becomes overwhelming. Collecting excessive information will also require you to store it (see Box 6-15). Therefore, consider carefully what information needs to pass to whom for decision making and for reporting. Section 5 details how to choose what to monitor and evaluate.

Box 6-15. What you store is just as important as how you store it

On the surface, the information management system in an IFAD-supported smallholder cattle development project in Asia looked good at the end of two phases. It was filled with extensive data from the project and had been computerised and updated. However, several flaws in the system impeded project impact assessment. For example, despite extensive staff training, it proved too formidable a task to enter more than ten years of data for all project activities. The data overemphasised physical achievements and credit repayment, with no monitoring of farmers’ perceptions of how they had benefited. Socio-economic indicators were lacking in many ways. There were technical flaws in the selection of respondents and the size of questionnaires, etc. Historical records were not kept on loan repayments. Furthermore, most of the survey data were not analysed. This did not allow for time-series data analysis and, therefore, impact could not be measured.

2. Who needs access to the information and when?

How the data are stored depends on who is to have access to the information and how often. Information to guide the project strategy is critical for managers (project staff and implementing partners), steering committees, primary stakeholder representatives and funding agencies. Information on operations is critical for fieldworkers, managers of project components and primary stakeholders.

Consider the skills of the users and the types of communication with which they are comfortable (see Box 6-16). Only store material where it will be used. This is particularly important with the raw data on paper, such as diagrams. Do not assume that all diagrams need to be copied, distributed and stored at all levels. Only keep them where they are used. This usually means leaving the originals with the stakeholders who produced them.

Box 6-16. The advantages of decentralised computer-based data storage in Guatemala

A computerised data processing system can form the basis around which to decentralise and encourage ownership through participatory collection, recording, analysis and reporting. This is the case for the automated monitoring system of the Cuchumatanes project in Guatemala. There, the M&E unit only needed to review the quality of the data gathered and manage the information at the central level. The field implementers were trained to use the computerised storage system and every region had access to its own information. Managers of each implementing partner were responsible for feeding the system, producing the reports and sending them to a central M&E unit. The automated system was eventually transferred to an implementing partner after training, and the project M&E staff maintained access through the electronic network. This set-up allowed for each organisation to know its status in relation to its annual work plan and also to have timely information for local decision making.
3. What type of information needs to be stored – hard copies or data that can be computerised and accessed centrally?

The more people who need to use information, the better it is to computerise it. However, not all data gathered at a local level will be entered into a computer. This can be due to local implementing partners and primary stakeholders not having access to computers or electronic networks or lacking the necessary skills, or because the information is diagram-based. Diagrams can be (photo-)copied and distributed to those who will need access in that form, for example, local groups and community-based facilitators. Generally, however, you will only need short reports that summarise the findings from the discussions that occurred as the diagrams were generated and from the diagrams themselves.

4. Regularly assess what information you need to keep and what can be discarded.

A data-storage system will soon get congested and overflow if it is not updated regularly. This is as true for archives of hard copies as it is for computerised data. Computerised data are more easily archived in unobtrusive yet accessible ways. Simply make backups and store them in a safe place away from the hard disk.

For hard copies, making decisions about what to discard is more critical. Make sure that you keep all material you are legally required to store, such as tax and audit-related financial records, for the required time period. This will vary per country. Also make sure that you keep copies of all material you need for making comparisons of change over time. This includes baseline data, summaries of progress with implementation and interim impact information.

6.5 Communicating M&E Findings for Action and Accountability

6.5.1 Why Communicate M&E Findings

M&E-related findings have many potential audiences. When reporting on progress with the AWPB, you will direct yourself to funding agencies, steering committees, cooperating institutions and implementing partners. Primary stakeholders have a right to knowing overall how the project is progressing and they deserve the opportunity to react to initial findings. Funding agencies and managers need information on impact, while all implementing partners need to understand problems in order to find solutions. Two sets of M&E findings will need to be communicated.

First, it is good practice to discuss draft M&E findings with implementing partners and primary stakeholders in order to get feedback on accuracy, reach joint conclusions and agree on next steps. Once the M&E findings are agreed upon, these can be communicated to funding agencies, cooperating institutions, government departments and other projects. This second set of final findings will fulfil accountability needs but can also serve for advocacy purposes.

6.5.2 Planning How to Communicate M&E Findings

Know Your Audiences

Reach agreement with project stakeholders on who needs to receive what kinds of M&E information. Table 6-8 shows the information needs of different audiences for a World Food Programme project in China. It outlines what data and insights the M&E system must produce and for whom. Note that it focuses on communicating for accountability and not on communication for action and decision-making purposes.
When undertaking an audience analysis for your project, remember to:

- include accountability, advocacy and action-oriented audiences;
- define what you expect from the audiences by communicating with them (financial support, commitment to action, etc);
- agree on the information (content and form) they need in order to achieve your purpose.

Table 6-8. Audiences for information on a WFP project in China (high/medium/low priority)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Audiences</th>
<th>Progress Toward Goals</th>
<th>Achievements</th>
<th>Economic Impacts</th>
<th>Intervention Lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County government</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-delivery agency leaders/staff</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Depends on type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher level officials</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Depends on type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding agencies</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other county groups</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Build Communication Into Your M&E System

Do not hope or expect that someone else in the project will communicate M&E findings. Plan for it from the onset. In Ghana, a workshop was organised with different M&E actors in order to develop a flow chart for the routing of M&E information from the grassroots level up to project management. The flow chart identified and offered solutions to communication bottlenecks in the M&E system, plus it identified who was responsible for the different information flows and established necessary frequency and deadlines for report submission. By discussing and planning for these communication issues, the M&E system was more likely to operate smoothly (see Box 6-17).

Box 6-17. Information flows in Zimbabwe’s SISP ensures feedback, action and accountability

Information on the indicators from all the irrigation schemes is fed into annual plans. In turn, these scheme-level annual work plans and budgets feed into the district-level planning process, and the outputs of which are used to plan at the national level. Although the provincial level is not involved in SISP monitoring, it will receive information about activities per component in the form of progress reports. Once the information has been synthesised at the national level, the findings will be communicated back to the districts and to the schemes, first in the form of changed or consolidated priorities and work processes (feedback and action) and then in the form of newsletters at the scheme level (feedback).

Not only do members of individual irrigation schemes learn about their own progress through M&E, but they are also able to view the data related to other schemes and so can compare their own performance. In addition, receiving information on the institutional performance of SISP is critical. These types of feedback ensure that the stakeholders remain accountable for their actions.

Invest in Good Communication

A good communication strategy can generate more support and interest in your project – it is worth the investment. Box 6-18 lists some elements that made the communication strategy of the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project in India a success. They include professionally prepared presentations of progress and constraints, which were used with positive results at high-level meetings. Investment is not only in terms of producing effective outputs but also in project-based capacities (see Box 6-19).

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Box 6-18. Linked and complementary M&E documentation

Communication in the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project in India included these complementary ways of reporting on self-help groups (SHGs).

- A pictorial self-monitoring system for self-help groups helped in monthly and annual monitoring. The system was composed of a three-category ranking system to be used for 16 indicators – ranging from the quality of meeting preparations, to repayment records, to collective decision-making.
- The district reports captured process issues in the formation of village development committees and the SHGs.
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development produced a newsletter that provided information on the progress of the SHGs at the district and overall-project levels.
- The analysis of the project’s progress was presented at high-level meetings and included clear and understandable graphic representation of the trends.

Box 6-19. Production manager is recommended to support appropriate communication strategy in Zambia

The communication strategy recommended a production manager for the Zambian District Development Project for:

- messages to be translated into languages and formats well-suited for the target audience(s) in a timely manner;
- a labour-intensive and time-consuming process to move communication ideas (text, images, concepts, etc.) into products, field testing and quick dissemination;
- interactive, transparent communication flows.

This strategy necessitates a production manager who:

- has experience in developing participatory communication materials and methods;
- understands the strengths and weaknesses of these materials and methods;
- has extensive experience with a wide variety of vendors, from printers to graphic artists to photography studios;
- will work closely with the technical person in the project support unit and coordinate the process of moving the materials from their raw stage to the final product.

Box 6-20. PRA sequence with key feedback sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps Taken</th>
<th>Methods Used and Their Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of secondary data</td>
<td>Desk review (literature review, in-country sources and grey literature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary data gathering</td>
<td>Key informant interviews and focus groups (structured/semi-structured) – at the national, regional and local (government, primary and other stakeholders) levels Resource mapping Transect walks (local level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collation and analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial feedback</td>
<td>Graphic trends, maps, pie diagrams and such with field staff (extension agents, M&amp;E unit, etc.) and primary and other stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative survey (“last step”)</td>
<td>Questionnaires, biophysical measurements during a transect, group discussions, etc. to gather information to cover unanswered questions, fill gaps in the data and substantiate controversial findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final feedback</td>
<td>At the national (project management, relevant ministries, donors (IFAD, etc.) and local (primary stakeholders) levels Inter-organisational seminars (to check validity and pertinence of results pertaining to project goals, activities, ongoing efforts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plan Workshops to Seek Feedback and Plan Action**

A key communication task is to ensure that your findings are correct. For this, you need to organise feedback sessions with those stakeholders who can verify findings. This is also a good moment to analyse implications and agree on actions. You can include this in your plan for the sequence of methods (see Box 6-20). Also refer to Section 8, which offers many ideas on how to ensure that an M&E event is communicated and reflected upon, and thus is more likely to lead to action.

**6.5.3 Practical Considerations When Presenting Information for Feedback and Action**

- Ensure clarity of message for specific audiences. The interests and concerns of different audiences vary and will require adapted reports, both in terms of content and language. Reports should communicate different levels of detail according to the audience being addressed. For example, strategic and implementation levels of management require different focuses. At the strategic level, you need to provide a general review of the project’s progress and problems. At the implementation level, more detail is required to help facilitate and coordinate day-to-day project management tasks.

- Agree on the frequency for communicating information. This will often fit the timing of decision-making meetings. If you are holding a meeting in order to seek immediate feedback, choose a time when people will be able to come.

- Ensure timeliness. Be sure to present information while there is still momentum, in order to benefit from the feedback. However, if setbacks should take place, be sure to let the audience know and be clear about the delay involved. This issue is not only important for getting feedback, but also for maintaining project credibility.

- Consider location. Box 6-21 shows the importance of thinking about various conduits of information to be sure that how and where you share your findings will be able to reach people, providing them the opportunity to give feedback.

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**Box 6-21. Remember to tap into informal conduits of information**

Various consultation processes have been integrated into the District Development project in Zambia as an essential part of the project’s M&E system. Those involved in the consultations are considered to be important conduits into other formal and informal village information dissemination processes. Issues of interest in rural communities can pass quite quickly through informal channels such as markets, social events (church services, etc.), and weddings or funerals. Focused communication campaigns do not penetrate these informal channels easily. Informal venues provide an excellent opportunity for social discussion as people feel more comfortable in these settings to ask questions and talk, forming individual and group opinions.

- Make effective use of graphic information to facilitate analysis. Visually presented information is often easier to understand. The better and more quickly your information is understood, the more likely you will get direct, useful feedback. There are many ways to present your information pictorially: through the use of graphs, diagrams, maps, pictures, photographs or videos. Some of these presentation forms will arise naturally as a result of your choice of data-gathering method. For instance, by showing the results of a series of mapping exercises or photographs, people can see at a glance what has been measured, how and how it has changed. Other visual portrayals, such as graphs or pie charts, need to be created from the information obtained through statistical data analysis.
Keep focused on your task. A feedback session can strand in a general talking event with no clear outcomes. Plan the event carefully around the anticipated outputs – e.g. clarifications, additional insights, conclusions, action steps, etc. Don’t rely on improvisation as your main facilitation strategy. It is always necessary but too much can lead to confusion. Avoid imposing ideas by thinking how people are most likely to share their thoughts on the M&E data. Be sincere in the reporting – include the new insights, otherwise participation will become a farce.

6.5.4 Different Media to Communicate Findings

Written Reporting

M&E reports vary from formal progress reports, to special studies, to informal briefs in the form of memorandums highlighting a current issue. Most IFAD-supported projects produce annual work plans and budgets, quarterly and mid-year progress reports (see Box 6-22), a mid-term review and a completion report. Some produce annual reports and many have newsletters (see Box 6-23). A small booklet of stories and photographs was used to report on the impact of Ireland Aid’s Water and Environmental Sanitation Programme in Western Uganda. As mentioned in the introduction, “It is important to recognise and record the impact of development projects on individuals’ lives, as felt by the people themselves. By listening to their voices, hearing their stories and learning from them, we begin to understand the impacts of development assistance on daily life from people’s own perspective, and put a ‘human face’ on a programme’s impact through the use of photographs, stories and oral histories.”

Box 6-22. Using a logframe to guide reports in Colombia

In PADEMER, reports from the implementing partners have been streamlined to focus on the logical framework structure. This allows a clearer overview of the effects and impacts that were hoped for (in accordance with the formulated indicators) and of the activities with which they would be achieved. Partners were trained in using this format. Formats were also made to present technical and financial reports per trimester. They are simple reports that allow a clear view of what each project is doing. Subsequent payments depend on the presentation of good reports. Reports are expected 1) to be brief and objective and take down only information that is basic and indispensable, 2) to present the current state of actions based on the programming and data of the approved logical framework, and 3) to be submitted in printed form and on diskette, by electronic mail, and using predefined structures, such as the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Execution Period (Start and Finish Date)</th>
<th>Percentage Realised</th>
<th>No. of Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of the activity:

Place:

No. of participants: Men: Women:

What was done and how:

Results of the activity:

Experiences obtained:

Difficulties encountered and solution(s):
Oral Reporting

Your M&E findings can be communicated more effectively verbally than by other means. Much decision making is based on information obtained through personal contacts and oral presentations. To speak directly to a target audience provides a quicker and more flexible way to convey your message. You can modify your presentation according to the feedback you receive. When conducted well, face-to-face contact can lead to greater understanding and more frank discussions on your findings. Bear in mind that some information may be better conveyed in individual rather than in group meetings.

Radio can also be effective. In one project in Peru, 20 farmers’ radios provide daily information on current activities, project-related decisions, resources to be transferred to the communities, meetings, visits, and interviews with farmers and extension agents. The radio plays an important M&E function by disseminating information and decisions and motivating stakeholders.

Visual Displays

Visual displays, such as graphs or charts showing trends or maps, help illustrate and supplement data in reports or oral presentations. You can also choose to photograph or shoot video images on changes (see Method 20, Annex D). Photographs can bring a project or community alive in a way not possible through words and diagrams. Dramatic presentations, whether on video or live, can be another good way to communicate insights with greater impact than on paper.

Being more creative, however, can mean more time and money to develop the idea and train (or hire) people in necessary skills. This needs to be considered when looking at alternatives.

Section 8 provides valuable additional information on critical reflection that is fundamental when communicating M&E data. Sections 3, 4, 5, and 8 include additional material on reporting of M&E-related information.
Further Reading


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Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
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Key Messages

- Building capacity for M&E involves external and on-the-job training not only for project staff but also implementing partners and primary stakeholders. Joint development of M&E is critical for capacity-building.
- For people to do a good job, they need to be motivated. So the right incentives are critical and come in many shapes and forms.
- Make the most of inputs of staff, partners, primary stakeholders and consultants by ensuring everyone is clear about her/his responsibilities. This helps you avoid gaps and duplicate or contradictory efforts.
- Pay attention to where M&E functions and information flows fit in the project so that the insights gained can feed into timely decision making.
- People can fulfil their M&E functions better with an appropriate and flexible information system that provides easy access for data entry, analysis and retrieval.
- All of the above needs to be supported by thoughtful use of the existing budget.
- In all M&E efforts, work towards creating learning processes that support local development. A decentralised learning process between stakeholders requires local capacity-building, with local resources and structures.

This Section is useful for:

- Managers – to ensure that M&E staff have sufficient resources, capacities and structures to develop and implement the M&E system;
- M&E staff – to check that proposed resources, capacities, support and structures are sufficient for M&E to be effective;
- Consultants – to make sure the M&E component has been designed comprehensively enough and with sufficient resources, capacities and flexibility and to ensure that sufficient and appropriate resources, capacities and support structures exist for carrying out M&E responsibilities.
7.1 An Overview of Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions

7.1.1 Capacity for People and Their Organisations

When asked why a project M&E system is not working, a common response is “poor” or “insufficient capacity”. Capacity is “the ability of individuals and organisations to perform functions effectively, efficiently and in a sustainable manner”\(^1\). According to most people, “capacity” means the human ability – knowledge and skills – to do a given task.

A most common answer to inadequate capacity is “let’s send the M&E officer on a training course” where new knowledge can be heard and new skills can be practised. Although a training course can provide valuable input, every course has limitations. In practice, much capacity is built on the job through concrete experience.

For an effective M&E system you need skilled people who can, between them, fulfil the M&E functions and tasks. Key tasks include: designing the general outline of the M&E system (see Section 3); setting up and operating supportive computerised systems (see 7.5); facilitating learning in reflective events (see Section 6); and managing the communication of M&E findings (see Section 6). Meeting capacity needs will require that you:

1. Acquire the right people by:
   • hiring already trained people;
   • training your staff (internally or via external courses);
   • hiring external consultants for focused inputs.

2. Ensure capacity of good quality by:
   • removing disincentives and introducing incentives for learning;
   • being clear about what you expect;
   • keeping track of staff performance through regular evaluations;
   • outsourcing data verification;
   • striving for continuity of staff;
   • finding a highly qualified person to coordinate M&E.

---

3. **Build capacity for M&E.** Start by developing an M&E training plan for all stakeholders - and with them. This entails agreeing on who is expected to do what and assessing if they have the necessary skills and conditions. You can undertake training using a combination of these three options:

- external courses;
- internal courses, tailor-made for stakeholders and linked to the development of the M&E plan itself;
- on-the-job training/mentoring.

4. **Invest in capacity for participatory M&E (PM&E).** Work closely with project staff, implementing partner staff and primary stakeholders to identify what is needed to make PM&E work and to develop plans to fill capacity gaps. When working with consultants on PM&E, clearly define her/his responsibilities, hire the same consultant(s) to ensure consistency in approach and build relationships among stakeholders; also, include PM&E in the terms of reference (TOR) and discuss with each potential candidate how she/he sees PM&E.

### 7.1.2 Paying Attention to Incentives

Putting in place incentives for M&E means offering stimuli that encourage project managers, M&E officers and primary stakeholders to perceive the usefulness of M&E, not as a bureaucratic task, but as an opportunity to discuss problems openly, reflect critically and criticise constructively in order to learn what changes are needed to enhance impact. It involves implementing encouragements and removing disincentives.

When thinking about incentives, consider those you can put in place within the boundaries of the organisation, that is, without rocking the boat, and also those that might require structural changes to the way the project is organised and operated. Also consider whom they are meant to stimulate so that they engage with learning-oriented and participatory M&E. This will allow you to fine-tune incentives for particular groups.

Incentive systems should be equitable, applied in a timely manner, be compatible with the project’s principles and strategies, and be recognised as part of a project’s policy. Incentives need to be context specific and aimed at supporting sustainability of efforts. This is why financial incentives are undesirable in many contexts, as sustaining them beyond the life of the project would be unfeasible.

Good incentives for M&E are closely linked to general management efforts to improve overall project performance. Examples of common incentives include:

- clarity of M&E responsibility in job descriptions and work plans;
- appropriate salaries and other rewards, such as housing and vehicle use;
- support to carry out required project activities, such as making financial and other resources easily available;
- professional development for career advancement.

You do not have as much influence over incentives for implementing partners and primary stakeholders as you have for project staff. Yet it is crucial for them to be as motivated as project staff, when it comes to participatory learning-oriented M&E. See 7.3 for more ideas.
Incentives will change during the life of the project. Keep motivation high by changing incentives. They may vary per project phase as the M&E tasks and issues change and, in some cases, actions taken early on may prove to be incentives at a later stage. For example, in Ghana, potential applicants for project positions had to go through an intense selection process. On top of this, ministry staff that applied also had to be nominated by the head of their department. Because they knew they had passed a tough recruitment process, project staff, including those in M&E, held a high respect for each other’s professional skills and abilities.

7.1.3 Getting an Optimal Structure for M&E Responsibilities

Getting the basic structure for a project’s M&E functions and responsibilities right can avoid major communication bottlenecks, conflicts of power and interest, forgotten or duplicated tasks, and wasted efforts. This saves resources and headaches. Organising responsibilities means considering the most appropriate contribution for project staff, partner organisation staff and primary stakeholders – and how to link these.

M&E is part of every single person’s job, from the messenger to the project director. Monitoring is a daily and spontaneous activity. Yet it is important that M&E functions also have a clear position in the project structure, whether among project staff, with partners or among primary stakeholders. High visibility and clear positions of authority for those with M&E responsibilities can help link information to its use in decision-making.

To ensure clarity of M&E functions and tasks:

• define the M&E responsibilities of implementing partners and primary stakeholders;
• consider what staffing levels are appropriate for the set of M&E tasks and functions you need to fulfil;
• allocate clear levels of authority to M&E-related staff;
• ensure overlap between project management and M&E;
• use detailed job descriptions for each staff member to coordinate inputs.

All projects use consultants in some form, local or foreign, short-term or long-term, extending big responsibilities or small tasks. Ensure that:

• you are using them strategically for M&E development in ways that build local capacity and build on existing M&E forms;
• when contracting them, you are completely clear about what you expect them to add to the existing systems and expertise, by when and in what manner (particularly vis-à-vis primary stakeholders) they are expected to work;
• you are working with as much continuity of consultants as possible to minimise the need to reconcile conflicting advice.
7.1.4 Thinking through the Information System

In IFAD-supported projects, the quantity of information that is collected and needs to be shared justifies well thought-out information systems that store data and make data accessible to others. This is also vital for a participatory process. Documentation provides the foundation for interactive communication, transparency, consensus-building and continuity.

Storage of two types of information is needed – impact-related information to guide the project strategy and progress-related information to track operations. To store this range of information, from survey data to copies of contracts and correspondence, will probably require different information storage systems.

Computers can make a critical contribution to tracking and using data but are no panacea. Achieving impact certainly does not depend on computerising data. Information that needs to be shared can also be photocopied and circulated, with each recipient using a common filing system.

To set up a computerised information system, follow these steps:

1. Define what you want to store in the information system and for what purpose.
2. Define your basic network structure by analysing how, when and by whom the database will be used (see Figure 7-1 as an example of a network structure).
3. Identify how you plan to process the information, who will do it and what forms this will require.
4. Compare options for software and hardware (the network) and decide whether to invest in existing software or contract a specialist for tailor-made software.
5. With your preferred option in mind, undertake a more focused data management analysis.
6. Establish the formats needed for database entry.
7. Provide user training on the system, otherwise it might never get used optimally.
8. Adjust the system regularly by evaluating its use with the users.

7.1.5 Finances and Resources to Do the Job

Solid and systematic learning costs money. Financial resources are needed for the time people spend, for supporting information management systems, training, transport, and so forth.

Key items to include in the budget are:

- contracts for consultants/external expertise (fees and travel expenses);
- physical non-contractual investment costs;
- recurrent labour costs (permanent staff salaries, temporary support staff);
- focused labour inputs, such as technical assistance, TA (short or long term, national or international);
- training and study tours for M&E-related capacity-building;
- non-labour operational costs (e.g., stationery, meetings, allowances for primary stakeholders and project implementers, and external data such as maps).
While there are no fixed rules for this, M&E budgets range from 2% to 15% of all costs. In projects where stakeholders are exploring new ways of working with partners, M&E budgets are likely to be proportionally higher as more time is needed to reflect on what works. Note that each project clusters its M&E costs differently, according to the adopted approach.

Irrespective of how the M&E budget is calculated, it will always overlap to some degree with other project activities. Therefore, do not excessively detail the M&E budget. Much learning occurs through the normal interactions of project implementation. What is most important is to budget for the events, procedures and staff time that support project learning and reflection.

Participatory learning processes are more time intensive than those in which only a few people are involved. More time is needed to organise meetings with larger numbers of people and more diverse groups and to reach agreement on how to proceed with M&E or on what data mean. Consider these budget items for participatory M&E:

- specific training for staff in participatory techniques and participatory M&E;
- extra meetings with stakeholders for designing M&E;
- additional meetings for local-level analysis;
- short training workshops on key steps in designing M&E and specific elements such as indicators and methods (including using the logframe matrix).
### 7.2 Human and Institutional Capacity

#### 7.2.1 Essential Capacities for M&E

Two sets of skills are critical for M&E to be effective: that for dealing with diverse data and that for dealing with diverse people. But many more skills come into play. Table 7-1 lists key areas of M&E knowledge and skills to which each project should have access. As M&E officer or project director, you can use this as a checklist to know if you have the right mix of skills and understanding available among the project stakeholders.

Depending on the project’s size and resources, functions can be combined or be assigned to implementing partners, sub-contractors, primary stakeholders or project staff. No matter who has the competency, they must be available to the project and not duplicate efforts and not work in opposite directions (see Box 7-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge/Skill Needed</th>
<th>Possible Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview perspective of project M&amp;E system (basic procedures and core communication flows) to make integrated design possible</td>
<td>Project director, and M&amp;E staff and managers (from project or implementing partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good understanding of gender, participation and poverty issues to ensure focused and appropriate M&amp;E feedback to donors</td>
<td>Sector specialists or project component coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of how to develop a joint learning system in a participatory manner</td>
<td>M&amp;E unit staff or consultants with experience in participatory M&amp;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for learning methods</td>
<td>M&amp;E staff or field staff, with help from external consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation skills for reflective sessions</td>
<td>Everyone who is responsible for some aspect of joint analysis (from community-based to project team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of field tools to collect data</td>
<td>Data collectors, particularly field agents but also managers who do relationship/staff monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to check data quality</td>
<td>External organisation, maybe cooperating institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to aggregate and statistically analyze data</td>
<td>Statistician or economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to assess implications of data for each project component</td>
<td>Managers of project components (which could be implementing partners) and primary stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of local conditions, changes and impacts</td>
<td>Primary stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent opinions on project impact</td>
<td>Externally contracted evaluators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Box 7-1. Eliminating duplication of efforts

In an Indonesian project, fieldworkers collect much data about local credit groups. But so does the bank. Key data on savings and loans is collected from farmers’ groups by fieldworkers for the project and by the groups themselves for the bank. Once a farmers’ group’s request for a loan is approved, the bank starts keeping a computerised record of the group’s loan and savings. The group also keeps its own hand-written records on savings and loans to ensure transparency among the members. The group’s information is collected each month from all 55,000 members. This is processed, typed and aggregated before being sent via the sub-districts and ending up at the ministry in Jakarta. Meanwhile, computer printouts from the bank with the same data also reach the ministry every month. While both farmers’ groups and the bank need to monitor the credit process for accountability reasons, duplication of efforts could be reduced if farmers were to use the bank’s records to check against their own and if the ministry were to accept the bank’s records as sufficient evidence of farmer credit operations.
7.2.2 Acquiring the Right People

As project director or coordinator of an M&E unit, you have three options to ensure you have enough of the right kind of capacity on hand.

1. Hire already trained people. This is ideal but very difficult for most projects to achieve. Few people are skilled in conventional M&E, let alone the type of participatory learning processes encouraged in this Guide, which asks for people to be creative, conceptually clear and good communicators. Hiring already trained people means being able to provide enough appropriate incentives to make – and keep – the job attractive (see 7.3).

2. Train the people you need. Training, on-the-job or through external courses, will always be necessary. Even the most trained M&E professional will need to upgrade skills and understanding. Primary stakeholders will need capacity-building to undertake their own M&E and contribute to the project's. Field staff will require continual skill building as information needs in a project shift and new methods of data collection and analysis are required.

3. Hire external consultants for focused inputs. Consultants are a common source of M&E expertise. This is a relatively expensive option and does not contribute as much to local capacity-building but it is often the only alternative when local expertise is not available and time is short. Consultants are particularly necessary at project start-up when staff may not yet be hired and relationships with implementing partners are weak. The initial workload involves establishing management and M&E processes, staff recruitment, finalising the AWPB, defining reporting procedures, setting up information systems, and providing on-the-job training. To make the most of consultants requires clarity about their expected contribution (see 7.4).

Your personnel strategy will be a mix of these three options. If, as project director, you want to create a learning environment, then you are likely to:

• try to hire the best possible person to guide M&E efforts or seek such a person from among the implementing partners to take on that responsibility;

• seek focused inputs by consultants on specific issues where time and/or skills are lacking, for example, to develop a participatory M&E approach to stimulate self-evaluation among primary stakeholder groups;

• draw up a plan of ongoing M&E training for all stakeholders contributing to M&E.
7.2.3 Ensuring Capacity of Good Quality

“Capacity” is not only a question of sufficient numbers. Good quality is fundamental. Being able to recognise good quality M&E will help keep your learning efforts on track. Box 7-2 shows what good quality M&E meant for one project in India.

Box 7-2. Do you know how to recognise good M&E?

Feedback on M&E from one project in India reported, “The project has gone into intensive and continuous training of staff for M&E and the managers were quite satisfied with the quality and timeliness of reports. There are two agricultural officers dedicated specifically to M&E who have been with the project almost since inception and appeared to be very well versed in the basic principles and practices of M & E. They analyse the monthly reports regularly, provide feedback for action to appropriate authorities and issues are taken up to the highest level if necessary.”

Quote sections in italics are criteria for good M&E capacity. In this case, good quality M&E staff are those who can:
• command a good understanding of the project context and stakeholders’ information needs;
• understand basic principles and practices of M&E;
• analyse data regularly;
• provide action-oriented feedback to the correct level in the organisation;
• deliver required reports that are up to good quality standards and on time;
• raise critical issues based on M&E findings at the highest possible level.

Remember that what is essential for one level of staff, with its specific responsibilities, may not be necessary at another level. For example, while you expect extension staff to be excellent communicators with primary stakeholders, the project statistician must be excellent at working with numbers. However, in projects where extension staff input field data, they must have several qualities.

Recognising good quality is one thing, but what can you do to ensure good quality M&E among the project and implementing partner staff? One Tanzanian project attempted this by changing its staff selection procedure to advertise positions outside the government, rather than only within. This offered more chance of finding someone with the right qualifications. In some Latin American countries, contestants for a management job in an IFAD-supported job participate in a training and selection process that includes a two to three day workshop. There they are observed discussing issues, how they deal with groups, make decisions, etc. The selection panel includes government staff, primary stakeholders, and experts. Section 7.3 deals with incentives as a way to ensure good quality.

Below are other suggestions for ensuring good quality.

1. Remove disincentives and introduce incentives for learning. Encourage project and partner organisation staff to be curious and open about learning by providing a range of incentives. Limit those disincentives that may keep them from sharing their mistakes and learning from them. See 7.3 for more on incentives.

2. Be clear about what you expect. Clarify the standards of the M&E capacity you expect and put procedures in place that make sure these standards are reached and maintained. Staff job descriptions (see Annex E) and performance reviews are key mechanisms.

3. Keep track of staff performance through regular evaluations. In most project documents, staff performance is assessed by the degree to which they implement project activities. But also assess what they have been learning from primary stakeholders and colleagues, what learning innovations they are initiating and how they are using any information they have collected.
4. Outsourcing verification of data. Any project can benefit from an external view on what is happening. One way to do this is to sub-contract an organisation periodically to check the quality of data and of data use. This will give you confidence in the methods being used to gather data and can provide additional guidance to project stakeholders on data quality. But avoid making it a policing exercise.

5. Ensuring continuity of staff. Continuity of staff is both very valuable and very difficult. By limiting the number of people who come and go during the project life, you can build a more consistent and less fragmented body of experience. A large part of keeping staff is offering the right incentives.

6. Find a highly qualified person to coordinate M&E. This can give them higher status vis-à-vis the rest of the team and makes it more likely that you have the kind of capacity you need at that level.

7.2.4 Building Capacity for Participatory M&E

Few appraisal reports detail how primary stakeholders should engage with M&E. Therefore, for projects working with participatory M&E (PM&E) there is also little clarity on the capacities needed by staff, by primary stakeholders and by consultants. For many projects that are still getting to grips with basic M&E, the idea of undertaking PM&E may appear overwhelming. While it does require careful thought (see Box 7-3), many small changes can be made that contribute to more interactive forms of learning.

Box 7-3. When and where to start with capacity-building for participatory M&E

When the ADIP project in Bangladesh started discussing PM&E, the project did not know how to undertake it. The implementing partners also were unclear on how to proceed with PM&E. While some partners were implementing elements of participatory monitoring, they had not been selected for their experience with M&E nor PM&E. The project was unable to provide the necessary guidance as it had no policy or strategy on participation and did not possess the necessary experience, capacity or financial resources. Project management has always relied on external consultants and so had no internal skills. Local government departments were in the same situation. To rectify the situation, the project sought several months of an M&E consultant’s input on participatory impact monitoring. Project managers also needed training. For both elements, the project sought extra funds not provided for in the budget. The M&E consultant was hired and then trained project stakeholders in PM&E. The consultant also worked with project management on how to use PM&E for better management and increased impact. The lessons learned were: (1) plan for PM&E in project design, (2) budget for PM&E, (3) select partners for their PM&E skills, and (4) implement PM&E training programmes early on.

Getting to Grips with the Implications of PM&E

Making M&E a learning process that extends beyond your project team means making M&E participatory. You will need to think through the many implications of including primary stakeholders actively in reflections on progress and impact, as well as in data collection, analysis, selection and updating of indicators, etc. (see Table 7-2).

For PM&E to be worthwhile, stakeholders – staff, implementing partners and primary stakeholders – must be able to participate meaningfully. This means that project and partner-organisation staff need skills in participatory facilitation techniques plus an appreciation of the importance of seeking other people’s views. Staff need to be committed to making participation happen. Good PM&E also means that primary stakeholders must have the conditions and understanding to make a significant contribution. To do PM&E well will inevitably require capacity-building for everyone.
Table 7-2. How participatory M&E differs from conventional M&E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet of M&amp;E</th>
<th>Conventional M&amp;E</th>
<th>Participatory M&amp;E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who plans and manages the process</td>
<td>Senior managers and outside experts</td>
<td>Primary stakeholders, project staff, managers and other stakeholders, often helped by a facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of primary stakeholders</td>
<td>Information provision only</td>
<td>Designing and adapting the methodology, collecting and analysing data, sharing findings, identifying lessons learned and linking them to action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How success is measured</td>
<td>Externally defined, mainly quantitative indicators</td>
<td>Internally-defined indicators, including more qualitative judgements and stories of personal change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Predetermined and fixed</td>
<td>Indicative and adaptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary stakeholders can participate in diverse forms and to various degrees of intensity in project M&E (see 2.7). The project team will need to decide with the implementing partners and intended beneficiaries what level of participation is feasible and appropriate. This forms the basis for understanding what capacities are needed. The following questions need to be considered:

1. Why are we seeking primary stakeholders’ active involvement in M&E? What do we expect will happen? What benefits do we expect for them and for the project (see Box 7-4)?

2. To make the process inclusive, whose participation is vital in M&E - remembering that a primary stakeholder group is far from homogenous?

3. What role should each stakeholder group ideally play? Do we see a role for primary stakeholders, for example, only in checking indicators suggested by field staff or also in co-designing the learning process from indicators to methods to feedback?

4. What obstacles do primary stakeholders and staff experience in involving primary stakeholders?

5. What capacities do we lack to make PM&E happen?

The answers will give you ideas about whose capacities will need strengthening in which way. For example, if representatives from primary stakeholders are to be involved in designing a participatory impact assessment, then they will need to be trained in the idea of “impact assessment” and will need to understand interviewing skills, the notion of indicators, and various types of analysis. Project staff will need to have the capacity either to facilitate such training for group representatives or to facilitate a hands-on learning process with them in the field.

Box 7-4. Degrees of local participation in M&E require capacity

Do you want to involve local women and men in:

- Defining what is meant by “impact”, M&E and learning?
- Designing purpose, process and methods for M&E?
- Defining themes to monitor/evaluate?
- Defining indicators?
- Giving their opinion of project history and the changes in the context?
- Giving their views on the degree to which project objectives have been met?
- Helping analyse and draw conclusions from the data/results?
- Sharing feedback with the primary stakeholders?
- Presenting and communicating the findings?
- If so, what capacities will they and you need?
Capacities for Staff (Project and Implementing Partner)

Once everyone has agreed on how primary stakeholders will participate in M&E, then together you can build a clearer picture of the capacities that project and partner staff will need. A capacity-building programme for staff of the project and partner organisations must deal with three issues.

1. Knowing why primary stakeholder views matter. This discussion on why local views on progress and impact matter requires an understanding of the importance of citizen participation, not just as an instrument for the project, but as an empowering activity itself that strengthens local self-reliant development. Where implementing partner staff are reluctant or hesitant to engage in more participatory forms of M&E – such as an annual project review with primary stakeholders – project staff will need additional skills to promote the idea and offer training. As project director or M&E coordinator, you will also need the skills to negotiate participatory forms as part of the partnership, in addition to understanding the issues deeply enough to argue the case effectively.

2. Building the facilitation skills to make it happen. The art of facilitation needs to be mastered, particularly by those who will interact most with primary stakeholders. This means understanding and practising techniques but also having the skills to design jointly rather than impose ideas of what should happen (see Box 7-5).

3. Being committed to seeing it through. No matter how experienced someone is with participatory data gathering or analysis, if he or she does not have an attitude of genuine interest and humbleness, then results will be compromised. Designing and implementing PM&E requires a self-critical look by all staff at their own attitudes and behaviours vis-à-vis primary stakeholders. This may require training. For the WUPAP programme in Nepal, M&E training was formulated as follows: “Based on the agreed design of the system, CBOs, PNGOs and programme staff will be trained in applying appreciative inquiry, reflection, focus group discussions, mapping, self-assessment and similar tools and techniques to strengthen their capacity to analyse, learn and act. This training will help them establish two-way communication and learning dialogue within and between them and other service providers.”

Box 7-5. Negotiations in PM&E on socially sensitive comparisons

In an M&E design workshop in Brazil, local farmers, NGO staff, farmer union representatives and university academics were deciding which method could assess the impact on milk production of a local mineral livestock salt. Discussion sought ways to compare the use to allow for more reliable analysis of impacts. The academics and some NGO staff wanted to compare milk production between cows fed with and without the mineral salt. However, all farmers who feed the salt to their cows are convinced of its merits. For a comparative study, farmers who were not involved or interested in the mineral salt would have to be included. However, the farmers at the workshop who would be doing the data collection, collation and analysis were reluctant to include such farmers. They said it would be too difficult socially to discuss the non-use of salt with their neighbours. Without the comparison, the indicator “milk production” was no longer felt to be feasible and another indicator and method were selected.

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Capacities for Primary Stakeholders

Giving primary stakeholders the opportunity to participate does not necessarily mean they will be able to use this opportunity. Building their capacity to participate is critical. Building local capacity will often mean simply going through each step of the M&E process with them. In this way, developing the M&E system and training primary stakeholders happens hand-in-hand. Some focused training sessions may be possible and useful but always in combination with the actual design of the M&E system, otherwise it becomes theoretical knowledge. Each new step can begin with a short training type session to encourage a meaningful input.

For example, if primary stakeholders are to be involved in selecting indicators, then a session on what an indicator is, its use and the advantages and disadvantages of various examples of indicators will be needed. One IFAD-supported project found inconsistency and lack of clarity in indicators chosen by primary stakeholders. Also all indicators were considered equal, so that a simpler more quantitative indicator, such as “regular meetings of the general assembly”, was given the same weight as a more complex qualitative indicator of organisational development, such as “ownership and management of project infrastructure”. A session with the primary stakeholders on how to select good-quality indicators might have helped.

PM&E with primary stakeholders can also be built into the overall participatory approach of the project and might not need a specific focus on building their M&E capacities (see Box 7-6). Building capacity for PM&E can contribute to building overall capacity and vice versa and, at the same time, it encourages project ownership and success.

Box 7-6. Incorporating M&E into a Moroccan project’s participatory approach

- To build capacity for pastoralist involvement in a Moroccan project, cooperatives were created as independent project partners that could continue with activities after the project would finish. These cooperatives received financial and technical support. The structure was simple. Pastoralists made up a general assembly and elected a president, secretary and treasurer. There was also at least one paid staff member: an administrator responsible for the cooperatives’ office duties. Membership was open to everyone, including people without livestock – and several cooperative presidents were from among the poorest. Many members struggled with basic organizational issues at the community level, such as accurate accountability and efficient communication, but they gradually became a strong force. Building internal evaluation processes strengthened the groups.

- One project team member started a self-evaluation process with the cooperatives’ administrative staff to discuss issues they faced. At these meetings, a facilitator assisted staff on issues they were unclear about, such as designing monitoring forms. The meetings were a chance for staff to analyse specific problems and offer solutions. Meetings became more regular and extra ones were called for specific needs or pressing problems. This self-evaluation process led to practical management changes early on in the project. These were: purchasing computers to assist in financial accounting, training the cooperatives’ administrative staff in bookkeeping and local laws governing cooperatives, and improving staff contracts.

- Another internal evaluation process is the project’s system of classifying cooperatives’ progress. The provincial agricultural department had set key objectives and key indicators related to professionalism in the cooperatives. Each cooperative was scored, according to these indicators, at large meetings in the presence of cooperative members. Members were able to give input in the scoring of other cooperatives, which encouraged inter-cooperative competition and motivation to improve performance. This also stimulated communication between cooperatives, project staff and the government department.
Working with Consultants or Sub-Contractors

Consultants are commonly hired for their capacity to develop computerised databases, identify useful indicators or establish information needs for operational management. Less common, but on the increase, is hiring consultants for their capacity in participatory M&E or sub-contracting this work. This raises questions. For example, an IFAD-supported project on community development, FODESA in Mali, is sub-contracting its work for annual participatory evaluations. What must it include in the terms of reference (TOR) to ensure that the work is high quality? What role will project staff need to play to check on quality? How can the consultant ensure that the local annual evaluations complement the existing project-driven M&E procedures?

How to work well with consultants is discussed in 7.4. Here, the focus is on three issues that are particularly critical for PM&E: focusing consultant input, ensuring high quality work and integrating consultant outputs with conventional M&E.

By its very nature, involving primary stakeholders will require ongoing testing of methods and processes and adjusting of M&E plans. So one limitation of hiring consultants for PM&E is that they are usually only available for short periods, not continually during project life. To make the most of consultants:

Make clear what she/he will be responsible for and what will be the responsibility of project and partner staff. Most consultants will only have time to develop detailed ideas and to test them out with staff and primary stakeholders before handing over the refining to the M&E unit.

Hire the same consultant for the series of inputs needed in developing the participatory work. The more you work with different consultants, with their different perspectives on participation, the more time project staff will need to invest in understanding and integrating the different outputs, and the more often the M&E direction will change.

Screen CVs of potential consultants and seek recommendations from people whose work with local communities you respect before you decide whom to hire. But remember that only by seeing a consultant in action, you can know for sure how good she/he is.

Include in the terms of reference how you expect her/him to work with PM&E (see Annex E) - expected concepts/approaches and timeframes, field trials of methods with primary stakeholders to establish feasibility and relevance, etc. Also request that the consultant's recommendations on participatory forms of M&E take into account feasibility within the budget and considering the project's staffing resources, and that any recommendations be clearly linked to the rest of the project M&E system.

Discuss how the potential candidate sees PM&E. Ask her/him to define and explain "M", "E" and "PM&E" and how she/he views the link between M&E for accountability and M&E for learning. Get agreement on this before making the choice. If there is too much difference between their perspectives and the rest of the project’s M&E, then ensuring a good fit will be difficult.
7.2.5 Developing an M&E Training Plan

**Assessing Training Needs**

A training plan emerges by comparing the needs for certain skills with existing capacities and then outlining steps to fill the gap. An M&E training plan should consider two basic skill sets: skills to facilitate the design of the M&E plan and those to implement the plan.

Clearly, your first priority will be to get a plan in place. This might require a first round of training key stakeholders.

Once the basic M&E plan is in place, only then does it make sense to analyse training needs with more precision, as only then you will know the type of M&E and responsibilities involved. This step can be quite detailed. For each level of the objective hierarchy, you will have specified the type of information you require and the data-gathering methods. For each of these, you must check whether the right people have the right skills.

Remember that this includes staff from the project and implementing partners and also primary stakeholders. Just as it is unlikely that you will have a fully trained team at project start-up, implementing partners are also likely to need and ask for some form of training. It is also quite likely that there will be considerable differences among the partners, all of which will contribute to the project’s M&E system. Provide for in-house training of key stakeholders on fundamental aspects of M&E. But don’t forget that jointly developing the M&E system will give a huge boost to M&E capacity.

The gaps you identify will form the basis for a training plan. Table 7-3 shows the elements to include in a training plan. Table 7-4 shows an initial training plan of a project in Nepal. In a project in Zimbabwe, the M&E training plan was merged with project management training needs, due to the large degree of overlap in skills and audience. Three levels of staff were to be trained in separate workshops: (1) senior management; (2) middle level staff; and (3) field staff below district level and community workers. Each workshop had an audience-specific training content and duration. Additional training was planned to include evaluation skills for senior staff; participatory analysis for field staff; and for all staff, problem solving and conflict resolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Skill Gap</th>
<th>Who Should Have the Skill (Person and Organisation)</th>
<th>When It Is Needed (Month/Project Year)</th>
<th>Most Appropriate Training Option (Cost/Benefit/Time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing Training Options

Once you know what skills are needed, you can decide what the most appropriate training option would be. You have three training options to fill the skill gap. Your training plan will probably include all three options in some form.

1. External courses. The most common courses are those provided in Europe or North America. Increasingly, however, regionally based courses are available. The advantages of external courses are the exchange with participants from other countries, the more focused/intensive use of time, the lower cost to send staff to an existing course rather than design your own training event, and the credibility overseas accreditation can add to a project’s M&E and incentives. The disadvantages are that external courses are not focused around project needs, the project M&E system cannot be created as one output of the training course, course material may not always be relevant, and a one-off training is never enough to build sustained understanding.

2. Internal courses. You can hire a consultant to deliver a training course for any of the stakeholder groups. The advantages are that internal courses are relatively cost-effective if larger numbers of staff are trained, target project needs and skill levels, serve to build a common language and provide understanding for all involved. Also, if the course is interactive, then you jointly develop elements of the M&E system en route. Disadvantages include: highly dependent on the quality of the consultant, more expensive and more time consuming if the training is integrated with the actual development of the M&E plan.

3. On-the-job training/mentoring. Most learning occurs through informal sharing of problems and solutions. You can formalise this approach to capacity-building by allocating time for key M&E stakeholders to consult with external M&E mentors. This can work as an incentive for staff, offers the option of timely and problem-focused advice, and allows for ideas that are fine-tuned to the project M&E system. However, finding these mentors may be difficult and they are unlikely to have ideas for all queries. Making such mentors available to primary stakeholders is equally important for their capacity development but may be even more difficult to organise. An alternative is to encourage and arrange for staff and stakeholders to interact with other projects that are more advanced in PM&E processes. The exchange-visit
approach can be particularly successful for training primary stakeholders. Some on-the-job strategies can be simple. A project manager in Indonesia maintained a strict procedure of monitoring at monthly intervals as well as quarterly and annually. He used this as a means to train staff in systematic and standardised implementation. As soon as he was confident in their capacity, he would reduce the monitoring frequency to quarterly and half-yearly intervals, being aware that it did not really make sense to monitor at such high frequency.

The final training plan for M&E capacity-building may and should overlap with project management and development training needs. Box 7-7 below provides an example of a capacity-building and institutional-support training plan. Such targets can be part of the project logframe matrix. In Nepal, the WUPAP logframe matrix includes a one-page summary of the M&E component as part of project management. It clearly outlines what is expected from the project in terms of M&E structures and quality.

Box 7-7. Capacity-building and institutional support component, output targets of the SFPDP project, Malawi
(M&E components are italicised)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National level capacity-building</th>
<th>Project specific capacity-building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Staff obtaining MSc level</td>
<td>• Production of participatory approaches manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduates with technical diploma</td>
<td>• Production of training materials on scheme design and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In-service technical courses</td>
<td>• Production of farmers' organisation manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extension staff upgrading</td>
<td>• Production of general scheme organisation and management manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Production of specific scheme organisation and management manuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff PRA training courses held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff training course in farmer organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff training course in scheme design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff training course in scheme organisation and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government department staff computer training course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Farmer training in scheme organisation and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• National study tours for farmers/staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PRA training of trainers course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• AWPB and M&amp;E courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• M&amp;E study tours to neighbouring countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional support

- Training for transformation courses (this is a specific approach to facilitating leadership and empowerment)
- Training for government department members
- Staff training in accounts
- Government department management training courses
- External review reports completion
- Completion of stakeholders workshop
- Completion report production
7.3. Incentives for M&E

Putting in place incentives for M&E means offering stimuli that encourage project managers, M&E officers and primary stakeholders to perceive the usefulness of M&E not as a bureaucratic task but as an opportunity to discuss problems openly, reflect critically and criticise constructively in order to learn what changes are needed to enhance impact. Giving incentives involves implementing encouragements and removing disincentives. Changing incentives touches the very heart of project culture and norms.

Not all stakeholders will automatically be motivated to, for example, learn new facilitation skills or have the patience to develop a joint learning process. Getting the factors right that motivate project stakeholders will enable them to experiment with changes. Basic motivational factors, such as the following, relate to good management (see Section 2):

- Everyone accepts and shares the mission statement.
- The organisational culture and institutional atmosphere encourages good performance.
- The history and traditions of the project and related organisations are respected and known for a focus on learning and improvement.
- There is a supportive, fair and inclusive leadership and management style.
- There is an attractive incentive and reward system, including performance-related incentive plans.
- There is a shared idea of promoting teamwork towards organisational goals.

When thinking about incentives, consider those you can put in place within the boundaries of the organisation – that is, without rocking the boat – and those that might require structural changes to the way the project is organised and operated.

Examples of structure-conforming incentives for learning-oriented project M&E are:

- prize for “most innovative fieldworker of the month/year”;
- study trips and training courses for staff;
- avoidance of staff retrenchment.

Structure-challenging incentives can include:

- review of project director’s performance by project staff;
- “downward accountability”, that is reporting to primary stakeholders on progress with implementation and including them in decision making on strategic planning;
- “citizen’s jury” about project strategy (see Section 8).

Incentive systems should be equitable, applied in a timely manner, compatible with the project’s principles and strategies, and recognised as part of a project’s policy. Incentives need to be context specific (see Box 7-8). Rewards should not be so great as to be unfeasible in the long term or to create disharmony either internal or external to the project. This has been happening, for example, in Andhra Pradesh (India), where a project found it difficult to get a good M&E team together because of the stiff competition between development programmes for the limited number of trained personnel. Generally there was frequent movement of government and NGO staff due to frequent transfers, low salaries and difficult work conditions. Project officers lamented that another project “stole” their community organisers by offering a higher salary.
Box 7-8. The region and the project-specific nature of incentives

In Morocco, government salaries and other benefits such as housing and holidays are already relatively good, so project staff generally attach less value to additional personal remuneration for M&E. They are motivated by having the right equipment and support, such as funds to hire enumerators, fuel for vehicles and essential equipment and supplies such as computers for local offices and paper for surveys.

In Yemen, the M&E post was held by the same person since the post had been created several years earlier. This contrasted sharply with the high staff turnover elsewhere. The M&E unit received good support and recognition from the project director and was included in the decision-making processes. Further incentives included the pooled use of vehicles, external training on M&E and performance-related salaries. Even though the unit had inadequate resources to undertake all planned activities, this did not detract from job satisfaction.

7.3.1 Motivating Staff (Project and Implementing Partners)

The impact of not considering staff incentives sufficiently can be far reaching. Box 7-9 shows two contrasting situations in which incentives made a noticeable difference to the workplace and to M&E.

Box 7-9. Incentives for a positive working environment in Ghana

Team members in a project in Ghana worked well and without much competitiveness between each other. For example, there was a lack of possessiveness about budgetary allocations. One outcome of the good working environment was that district staff were more willing to drop by the project offices, which increased informal information exchange and helped in activities such as the annual planning process. Reasons for the positive work environment were identified as follows:

- Most staff at headquarters and in the districts had been seconded from the same ministry. Many team members knew each other even before that, having attended the same schools and universities. Thus friendships were old.
- The project technical content was focusing on specific staple crops, which had previously received little or no attention by the agricultural development sector. Project staff were aware of the crops’ critical importance to the survival of many poor people in the country. Thus, staff felt they were really contributing to improving livelihoods.
- Salaries were higher than regular ministry staff, also giving additional allowances for travel and fieldwork. Even with the longer work hours and overtime required, this was very motivating.
- Professional training skills were offered to staff, thus making them more “marketable” once the project came to an end.
- The strict job selection procedure lent prestige to anyone working for the project.

In an IFAD-supported project elsewhere in Africa, the M&E unit had three managers during the first four years of project life. The first manager helped design the M&E system but left before implementation started. The second left after four months. Both left due to more attractive incentives being offered elsewhere. The current manager, promoted from a deputy position, described his own dissatisfaction, “We get no recognition by management and little support or resources.” Salaries were low, the local M&E manager received $100 per month compared to the $2,500 for technical assistance. The only incentives were provision of a house and use of an old car. The M&E manager explained, “The qualifications and experience of the 18 staff in my department are high – all headquarters staff and district heads are university graduates, with several specialised in programme evaluation. Most of my staff have long experience in extension and M&E. They have a very high level of work frustration.” This situation has solutions. While salaries and mobility are the responsibility of local government, financing of specific tasks are project decisions. The project could provide several interesting non-monetary incentives (see Tables 7-5 and 7-6).

Good incentives for M&E are closely linked to general management efforts to improve overall project performance. For example, project staff in India felt that one reason M&E had been able to reorient the project strategy was that the primary stakeholder groups who best adopted skills were recognised and publicised in the project newsletter. This public recognition gave M&E staff a positive image. In another example, a grading of primary stakeholder groups had been carried out by project management and presented back to the groups as a self-assessment exercise. The criteria for grading had been progressively refined based on feedback from the groups and other implementing partners. The desire by groups for upgrading acted as a
A powerful incentive for improved performance, including their M&E activities. After more feedback and participatory discussions, a grading system was then also developed for the implementing partners, which were local NGOs. This development was welcomed by the NGOs themselves.

Tables 7-5 and 7-6 are checklists of incentives and disincentives to help you assess whether you have done everything possible to establish motivating conditions. Sometimes very simple incentives can be effective. For example, in projects that are moving from a control-oriented to a learning-oriented M&E system, providing training to staff and other stakeholders is proof that they are trusted and are being encouraging to participate more freely in M&E. By investing in staff, the transition of project style becomes real. Sometimes very simple disincentives are in place that can obstruct learning. For example, in China, project M&E runs parallel to a state system of data collection that monitors province and district performance. As decisions at provincial and district level are made using the state data, there is little incentive for project staff to assess their own data critically.

**Table 7-5. Checklist for staff incentives that encourage learning-oriented, participatory M&E**

| ✔ Clarity of M&E responsibility: clear job descriptions, work plans, partner contracts |
| ✔ Financial and other physical rewards: appropriate salaries and other rewards, such as housing and vehicle use |
| ✔ Activity support: support, such as financial and other resources, for carrying out required project activities |
| ✔ Professional development for career advancement: training/external-learning opportunities, attending congresses to listen to and present M&E experiences, incorporating M&E experience into post-graduate studies/thesis |
| ✔ Personnel and partner strategy: hiring staff who have an open attitude to learning, signing on partners who are willing to try out more participatory forms of M&E |
| ✔ Recognition: listening to staff and acting on their recommendations, publicly recognising staff via competitions on “best M&E practitioner” or encouraging staff to present M&E experiences in public |
| ✔ Project culture: compliments and encouragement for those who ask questions and innovate, giving relatively high status to M&E among staff |
| ✔ Professional support groups: encouraging and funding staff to attend regional professional meetings of, for example, PREVAL in Latin America or the African Evaluation Association |
| ✔ Performance appraisal processes: equal focus on staff capacity to learn and innovate, rather than only on if they have reached their quantitative targets |
| ✔ Showing the use of M&E data: making the data explicit and interesting by displaying them on public boards and in newsletters |
| ✔ Feedback: telling data collectors, information providers and others involved in the process how their data was used (analysed), what it contributed to improve the project |

**Table 7-6. Checklist for staff disincentives that hinder learning-oriented, participatory M&E**

| ✗ Using the M&E unit as the place to park “demoted” or unqualified staff |
| ✗ Not making clear how data will be or was used |
| ✗ Confused or incomplete terms of reference for staff on M&E |
| ✗ Repeated complaints to staff about their incompetence in M&E |
| ✗ Chastising those who innovate within the project boundaries or those who make mistakes |
| ✗ Focusing performance appraisals only on activities undertaken |
| ✗ Salaries that are low and not paid on time |
| ✗ Frequent rotating of seconded staff to different posts |
| ✗ Staff feeling isolated or helpless in terms of their contribution being recognised towards achieving the project goal |
| ✗ Unconstructive attitudes towards what constitutes participation and/or towards the primary stakeholder groups |
Staff evaluation is particularly important. Performance-related incentives are generally considered important, but only if they go beyond quantitative achievements of targets. In several projects, the rigid monitoring of target achievement rates has encouraged the false reporting of achievements. In such cases, the supposed performance-enhancing incentive becomes an incentive for dishonesty and a disincentive for critical learning. Box 7-10 shows how staff appraisals can work as helpful reflections.

Box 7-10. Staff performance appraisal in KAEMP, Tanzania

Incentives with Seconded Staff and Implementing Partners

Some of the (dis-)incentives in Tables 7-5 and 7-6 are also relevant for seconded project staff and for partner organisation staff. But staff who are seconded from the government are already working within a specific incentive system, as are those working with implementing partner organisations. The project will not usually have the capacity to offer many incentives to those outside its direct authority but it can take into account external but related incentive structures when designing its own incentive system.

The project’s influence over incentives for implementing partners is often much reduced. Yet it is crucial for implementing partners to be as motivated for participatory learning-oriented M&E as project staff. To work smoothly with partners, here are some ideas.

1. Negotiate what the expectations are regarding M&E styles and responsibilities in contracts with implementing partners to avoid problems at a later stage (see Box 7-11).

Box 7-11. Clarifying expectations midway in Mali

In PDR-San, a Mali project into its fifth year, the project director must agree on the extent of M&E responsibilities with a critical implementing partner. Responsibilities need urgently to be renegotiated as the partner is only reporting with tables of raw data. The partner does not consider itself responsible for providing accompanying analysis or explanations. Yet the project director rightly says that he or his team cannot be expected to interpret the data, as they are not in the field implementing the activities. When questioned, the director of the implementing partner says that M&E is the same as “statistics”, whereas the project director sees M&E as including interpretation of data. The different expectations of what constitutes M&E are caused by ambiguity in the start-up documents and by non-participatory planning in the early phase of the project.

2. If partner organisations hesitate about PM&E, then it might be possible to split the M&E tasks. Project staff can facilitate the more participatory part while they fulfil the less interactive M&E tasks. Simultaneously, however, you can organise events to raise awareness about PM&E and identify obstacles with the partners.
3. Provide opportunities for joint training events which all field staff or all managers attend, irrespective of whether they are directly contracted, seconded or come from implementing partners.

4. Create and maintain a positive spirit of collaboration. An M&E consultant remarked that many projects she had visited held a condescending attitude toward implementing partners. This attitude negatively affected partner motivation and transparency of reporting, and so the overall project monitoring.

7.3.2 Encouraging Primary Stakeholders

For projects which have not yet developed a fuller participatory approach, a first step in encouraging wider participation is to understand the opportunity costs for primary stakeholders to engage with project M&E (see Table 7-7). People can only be expected to invest valuable time when the returns are of value to them.

Discuss with primary stakeholders what they will forgo when you ask them to participate in project M&E. Although their main benefit is in the form of an improved project, other benefits are needed if they are to sustain the effort you are asking of them. Basic financial compensation must be discussed although it is not always appropriate. Consider paying for meals during M&E sessions and reimbursing accommodation and transport costs. When primary stakeholders start to take on a key role in M&E, additional compensation must be considered – as might be the case of someone sitting on a steering committee or acting as a local community monitor to such an extent that they become a de facto project team member and lose time on their primary livelihoods.

Table 7-7. Primary stakeholders’ opportunity costs for getting involved in participatory evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Primary Stakeholders May Spend Their Time for the Project</th>
<th>What They May Lose as a Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the management and implementation of the project by:</td>
<td>• Time for their other activities, which may include productive, reproductive, developmental or political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interacting in interviews, focus groups, committee meetings, workshops/seminars and community meetings</td>
<td>• Cash contributions or extra spending on food, transportation and accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysing data, opinions and problems during mapping, transect walks, computerised data analysis, etc.</td>
<td>• Social position in relation to their non-project friends, peer group or rival groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaging in project-related cultural activities such as theatre, dance, storytelling and video/radio productions</td>
<td>• Satisfaction with their situation and lifestyle, at home, work etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Travelling to and from meetings, making study tours in other communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Waiting for other local people, outsiders, decisions and funds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public recognition of primary stakeholders’ input is important to sustain interest. Best of all, of course, is when primary stakeholders see that their voices have made a difference to the project. This can be ensured by regular feedback from the project management on progress and processes and particularly on developments and impacts at policy and institutional levels. Feedback of results works when the project has been operating for sufficient time to see results. For this reason, it is critical to have the primary stakeholders fully behind what the project is trying to achieve, and to share the vision and possibilities that might (or might not) occur. In a Peruvian project, monthly and annual presentations are given by field workers to community organisations, which has brought the community closer to the project and reduced the earlier hierarchical and paternalistic tendencies.

Many projects aim to influence government processes and policies, from the national to the village level. Primary stakeholders can be very motivated by working with structures and mechanisms that enable their voices to be heard at policy levels, knowing that it might be making a difference. There are many examples where projects have influenced national and regional policies. For example, in Nepal, recommendations from project evaluation workshops were passed to the government that then officially endorsed, in one case, that stunting among children should be instituted as an important indicator of project impact with respect to gender equity. In the same country, government regulations on forestry were amended to take into account leasehold forestry groups that had previously been sidelined. In India, policy changes negotiated during a microfinance project enabled direct lending to implementing NGO banks.

In another case in India, villagers turned around a form of corruption in village councils. It is normal practice in India to use village land records as testimonies of titles and possessions of a piece of land. It is also known that certain local village functionaries would expect a “small present” (bribe) for getting a copy. Members of one women’s self-help group in an IFAD-supported project were not spared from this practice. Most of the groups had to pay up. However, they started recording in the minutes of their meetings the names of the official who had asked for the bribe and the amount taken. These minutes were then circulated, as normal. When the other village functionaries found out about the forced bribery, they immediately returned the money.

### 7.4 Organising M&E Structures and Responsibilities

#### 7.4.1 Ensuring Clarity of M&E Functions and Responsibilities

Should there be an M&E unit? If so, should it fit into the project structure? If so, where? If not, where will the M&E functions be housed? Who is answerable to whom in terms of project impact, progress, lessons learned and problems? Appraisal reports often define the higher level of M&E functions and responsibilities by stipulating how the project will be governed in terms of steering, coordination and management committees. But many other details of the M&E functions need to be considered at start-up.

A central coordination or management unit services some projects. For instance, it might “monitor the physical and financial performance of the project and project parties” or “liaise with central ministries and agencies and IFAD”. Other projects have no centralised M&E unit but instead share M&E tasks among the implementing partners and with primary stakeholder organisations.

Box 7-12 provides a detailed example of one project’s strategy for its M&E functions and responsibilities. Box 7-13 provides three contrasting alternative structures. None of these is intended to serve as a model. They highlight two critical aspects:

- considering where to locate the M&E functions in a project structure (with primary stakeholders and implementing partners);
- being clear about M&E responsibilities.
Box 7-12. Functions and responsibilities of the M&E unit in the ADIP project, Bangladesh

The major functions of the M&E system and unit in the ADIP project have been defined as follows:

- Develop monitoring instruments and revise/modify these after field-testing.
- Develop guidelines and provide training to concerned staff of the project implementing agencies.
- Collect and record data by project component.
- Process and analyse data to provide information for reviews and reports.
- Prepare the annual work plan and budget of components/activities.
- Prepare and submit reports, both routine and special.
- Organise formal and informal discussions, meetings, workshops for reviewing and implementation for reflection.
- Establish a feedback loop by providing and receiving feedback to and from all stakeholders concerned, and follow up.

To implement the functions, the following broad strategy was devised:

- on-site monitoring by NGO and M&E staff – specifically, field visits with feedback and follow-up and collection of on-farm and field trials data which are then verified by the department agricultural extension – and feedback to primary stakeholders by extension staff;
- off-site monitoring by the M&E staff and NGOs, reporting progress regularly and compiling reports manually and with computer;
- special surveys and evaluation studies initiated and undertaken by internal and external project actors;
- reviews, through formal and informal discussions and workshops at all levels.

This project has three clearly defined lines of monitoring: (1) conducted and managed by the NGOs themselves for their own use; (2) jointly implemented by NGOs and project staff and meant for all concerned including project management; and (3) conducted exclusively by project staff for extension, research and other project activities. The NGOs perform M&E activities for their own needs, specifically M&E on credit operations, maintenance of group discipline and quality of groups. To maintain quality control, the project staff – particularly those from the M&E unit – regularly visit the NGOs and their groups to assess performance and provide feedback.

Project implementation reports and AWPBs specify in detail the ongoing responsibilities and tasks of each staff member in contributing to the overall output of the M&E system.

Due to concerns from IFAD and the cooperating institution about M&E staffing, the M&E unit has been expanded and is now staffed with 19 professionals. There are also four statistical assistants at the district level and one research officer at headquarters whose inputs are sometimes used for M&E purposes. The staffing arrangement in terms of distribution between government staff and technical assistance is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Staff Position</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>- Senior M&amp;E officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Research officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- M&amp;E specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District level</td>
<td>- M&amp;E officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Field monitoring officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local level</td>
<td>- Monitoring associate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This new staffing arrangement brings with it major challenges in the form of bringing everyone on board to a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and also in ensuring that capacity is improved in terms of quality as well as quantity.
Box 7-13. Examples of M&E structures

- One project set up the M&E section as a cell within the project management unit. This cell was staffed by a monitoring officer and one statistical assistant, with occasional support from hired local consultants. Meanwhile, data collection was the responsibility of project implementation units present in each district where the project was operating. Each project implementation unit was headed by a project officer responsible to the project coordinator and was provided at least one computer for M&E. The information collected in the districts was thus computerised and fed back to the project’s central M&E unit.

- The M&E unit of a 67-village income-generating project was staffed and run entirely by two officers. Decentralised management units, which were supported by NGOs, collected and analysed the primary data. Rather than dealing directly with the project components, the M&E officer communicated through the project director.

- Another M&E unit was located in the same organisational unit as project management. It had one highly qualified M&E manager, strongly supported by a chief technical advisor and assisted in the field by staff of other departments. M&E-related staff reported to the project director and the various heads of departments and were included in all project meetings. Reports by technical staff were also sent to the M&E unit, which sent them on to the project director. Field visits were made on a monthly basis, and all reporting was distributed to non-beneficiary stakeholders. At the local level, a project coordination committee, headed by the district commissioner and comprising of local stakeholders, met with other district committees on a monthly basis when special requests from parliament or from project departments were aired.

Finding the Right Place for M&E Functions

It cannot be overemphasised that M&E is part of every single person’s job, from the messenger to the project director. The director of the MARENASS project in Peru said, “We did not have a formal M&E unit for the first three years. This did not stop us from monitoring and evaluating our work. Everyone contributed, even the office driver had an M&E function.” Everyone, in their own way, keeps track of the operational and sometimes the more strategic aspects of their work – whether there is enough petrol in the tank or whether the team is working well and impacts are emerging. Monitoring is a daily and spontaneous activity. Decentralisation to encourage ownership of learning processes further emphasises this.

Nevertheless, experience shows that the location of those responsible for M&E is critical for performance. Linking it directly to project management helps ensure that M&E findings are used to inform decisions. This can be interpreted in different ways. The M&E unit of a Guatemalan project was planned as part of the executive board that supported project management, while in China the M&E unit was located within the responsible ministry. Try to make sure that M&E functions are represented at a high strategic and resource management level, and that they are also incorporated into the approaches and activities of all project implementers.

Simply giving M&E a high visual status in the project is not enough, as was found by one IFAD-supported project in Africa. It had been decided that to improve M&E, the M&E unit would be elevated to the status of a project department, similar to a field department. Despite this, the M&E coordinator explained that M&E still:

- made a limited contribution to major decisions in discussions on technical issues, while management decisions were made without M&E participation;
- made a limited contribution to monitoring field implementation, as this was undertaken by technical assistance experts directly under the project manager;
- had insufficient resources allocated to carry out its functions, in particular, inadequate budget support, transport and computer support.

Changes would be required in terms of attitude and in terms of organisational structures and clarity of responsibilities.
Setting up M&E-conducive organisational structures should have been addressed at project formulation (see Section 3). Responsibilities and power can be set up in such a way as to hamper or encourage learning among project stakeholders (see Box 7-14). They are often inadequately addressed but also affected by changes in the operating context that can require negotiations about organisational structures with responsible departments, IFAD or cooperating institutions, and implementing partners.

Box 7-14. When responsibilities and structures obstruct good M&E: Yemen, Morocco and Colombia

- The M&E functions of a Yemeni project were carried out by the M&E department of a government agency responsible for M&E in several projects, using national guidelines. This agency had much experience and was able to commence project M&E activities at an early stage. However, the agency did not have direct access to the project's M&E resources and had limited funds. Obtaining authorisation for activities and resources was a lengthy procedure, having to pass through a hierarchy of project management and government staff. Furthermore, as the relationship was sometimes tense, this affected M&E budgeting, incentives and adoption of M&E recommendations by the project. Project staff would often check data themselves without involving the agency, especially for information critical for management decisions. Being that the project M&E system had been based on the existing government system, it had limited relevance for the project. Also, the government agency did not prioritise M&E for this project as they also had several other projects to attend to. Overall, this organisational structure was hindering effective M&E.

- Two projects in Morocco were built directly into the provincial-level department of agriculture and hence shared many of the same staff, including the person responsible for monitoring agricultural activities for the entire province. While incorporating project activities within government structures may encourage sustainability, staff found that both projects had to compete with ongoing government work and political pressures. This resulted in a conflict between ensuring good management of the project and maintaining the normal work of the department.

- The model of project execution in a Colombian project appraisal report would have led to scarce interaction and knowledge of field issues by the project management. Information was to be sent from the implementing partner to the project in the form of a general progress report, the project itself having no direct contact with the partner NGOs developing the fieldwork or with the rural micro-enterprises of the primary stakeholders. Furthermore, the appraisal report stipulated that the project pay for an external evaluation unit to undertake evaluation functions. There was a danger that this would lead to duplicating activities, with the project M&E officer assuming monitoring functions and the implementing partner guiding the evaluation.

Clarity of M&E Responsibilities

Clarity of M&E functions and tasks (see Figure 4-2, Section 4 and Annex E) is essential. In a Colombian project, where monitoring had been separated from evaluation, confusion arose. Evaluation was the responsibility of the evaluation unit. Although monitoring staff did not have evaluation in its mandate, it still needed evaluation information for its own reporting. The evaluation unit had only undertaken extremely limited field visits since project start-up, so the monitoring staff ended up having to take on some of the evaluation activities. Keep monitoring and evaluation tasks and functions connected, rather than splitting them among different people as is common particularly when evaluation is sub-contracted.

Several key lessons have emerged from project experiences in terms of ensuring clarity of functions and tasks.

1. Clarify the M&E responsibilities of implementing partners. In Colombia, a project reallocated the M&E responsibility of reporting on impacts to project management. It had been in the hands of an implementing partner but this had not worked well. The project had learned an important lesson: always arbitrate services after making it clear in the agreement the commitments and responsibilities of each party and, above all, stipulate the information that should be reported in terms of effects and impacts, establishing concrete and clear mechanisms to guarantee this.

2. Clarify the M&E responsibilities of primary stakeholders. Clarity of functions with primary stakeholders can be laid down in memoranda of understanding and also in contracts. Although
Community members may start with a simple monitoring role, other roles, such as stakeholder responsibility for managing contractors (see Box 2-20, Section 2), can increase efficiency and effectiveness in implementation, and local ownership.

3. Consider what staffing levels are appropriate for the set of M&E tasks and functions that you need to fulfill. M&E performance is affected by staffing that is top-heavy, too light or distributed in a way that obstructs good communication and coordination. The M&E system for a very extensive income-generating project in Benin was designed with as light an overall structure as possible. One person was responsible for synthesising all periodic reports, checking with the field, entering basic data, dealing with multiple requests from project coordinators and so on. Much monitoring was carried out on field activities and impacts, but this was too much for one person to analyse, and there was insufficient time for partner performance assessments and impact studies. The project director described the situation as being “like a city having only one point of contact to the outside world, only to be cut off every time a problem comes up on the bridge.”

4. Allocate clear levels of authority to M&E-related staff. M&E-related staff need sufficient recognition to undertake functions that others in the project may perceive as intrusive. For example, if one person needs to coordinate progress reports, then she/he must have the publicly given status to ensure that other staff communicate the necessary data. Where M&E functions are decentralised and shared among different organisations, clear lines of communication and authority are equally pertinent but may require more negotiation.

5. Ensure overlap between project management and M&E. This will encourage the much-needed interchange to guarantee that M&E findings inform decisions. For example, in the RADP project in Yemen, the M&E coordinator would act as interim project director in the latter’s absence. Linking M&E responsibilities and activities with technical project departments also increases the overall capacity for learning.

6. Job descriptions for each staff member are crucial management tools. They help clarify expectations. See Box 7-15 for items to consider when elaborating job descriptions (also see Annex E).

Box 7-15. M&E items to consider when drafting job descriptions

- Which M&E responsibilities does the position include?
- What is the responsibility: design, data gathering, data inputting, reporting, facilitating, use of M&E data in decision-making?
- What type of issues will the position need to track – progress with activities, quality of process, etc.?
- What are the minimal reporting requirements you need from the position (e.g., raw “data”, analysed data, lessons learned, actions to be undertaken)?
- What quality standard do you expect the position to fulfil (e.g., timeliness or type, product/service)?
- What are the deadlines for the products/services?

7.4.2. How to Make the Most of Consultants

All projects contract consultants at some point in some form – local or foreign, short-term or long-term, extending large responsibilities or small tasks.

Strategic Use of Consultants for M&E Development

Hiring a consultant for a particular part of the M&E process usually means either you need extra expertise to cover for project staff’s lack of time or you need specific expertise or a particular view (e.g., on component activities or methodology) that project or partner staff may not have.

Consultants can be hired at any point of the project life. They can be hired as one-offs or hired for a longer-term input over several years. Working with consultants has both advan-
tages and disadvantages (see Table 7-8). With these in mind, consider well what you would like them to contribute, particularly in terms of building project capacity. Project staff in Benin saw that review missions were making very positive inputs through their systematic analysis and identification of pressing issues. The staff realised that the M&E system itself should be producing such an output but it had only ever posted generalists without such capacity to coordinate M&E work. To increase internal professionalism, they took to hiring experienced consultants for specialist expertise.

Table 7-8. Advantages and disadvantages of consultants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Working with Consultants</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Working with Consultants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Give quicker output (perhaps).</td>
<td>• Dependency on outside expertise diverts budget and attention away from investing in local staff. (This is reduced if working with local consultants.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to stand back from the project and ask questions that staff aren’t able to see.</td>
<td>• If working with different consultants, then project staff may need to reconcile contradictory or different views and ideas on how to tackle M&amp;E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bring interesting ideas from other projects.</td>
<td>• If not well recruited, they may only provide a piece of the missing expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can raise sensitive issues that project staff fear raising.</td>
<td>• If they are not committed long term to the project, then this may make their suggestions unfeasible and fit poorly in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can provide on-the-job training if they work closely with project staff.</td>
<td>• If they do not have local experience, then advice or ideas may be inappropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May be trusted by funding agencies for the impartiality of their views.</td>
<td>• If they work in isolation, then local capacity won’t be built.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can increase the professional level of M&amp;E.</td>
<td>• If not living locally, then they cannot help adjust and adapt their recommendations as they are being implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can provide focused inputs that are only needed once.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Clarity When Contracting Consultants

A project in Benin contracted a consultant to design its M&E system but did not include follow-up in the contract. The consultant’s TOR stopped at design. He helped review initial indicators and ideas for the baseline survey, the project team was not yet sufficiently settled to learn optimally from his input. As the consultant was not involved during the crucial phase of setting up the M&E system he had designed, additional technical know-how on data collection and analysis was lost. Clarity is vital: first in terms of the project’s needs and then in the terms of reference about the expected contribution to M&E. Consider the items below.

1. What contribution do you expect them to make, what specific outputs should they deliver, and what are the limits of responsibilities? Team leader of external evaluation, database designer, developer of participatory annual review process, etc.

2. When do you expect them to deliver the first draft and the final report? All in one intense period or in a series of shorter inputs? Before start-up or after?

3. To whom is the consultant responsible and with whom is she/he expected to work?

4. How is the consultant expected to work (alone, with project staff, in a more or less participatory style, minimum number and types of stakeholders to consult, etc.)? Will there be an opportunity for staff/primary stakeholders to respond to the consultant’s report?

5. Who owns the final report? Who will use it and how?

6. How much is this going to cost, also in terms of other support that the consultant may need from the project (e.g., transport or translation)? This will enable you to assess whether you are getting your money’s worth.
The project coordinator may not know the exact areas of technical expertise needed, so may find it difficult to write out the terms of reference. Asking the opinions of those who will be directly affected by the consultant’s input is good to avoid miscommunication about purpose and expected outputs. This will also help ensure a close fit between the gap in staff skills that the consultant is expected to fill and the needs of staff (project or implementing partner). Annex E provides some examples of TORs for consultants’ input.

**Reconciling Conflicting Advice**

The importance of continuity of perspective for M&E should not be underestimated. The more different consultants have a say in project M&E, the more problematic this may become, as each consultant has a theory of M&E, a set of methods, different priorities, etc. The more these are mixed, the more confusing this can be for a project. Many projects have faced the situation of working with different consultants over the years due to an inability of the consultant to commit him/herself to the project in an ongoing manner. A common effect is that the project is left picking up the pieces of partial and sometimes contradictory advice (see Box 7-16).

**Box 7-16. Conflicting concepts from consultants in Mali**

The PDR-San project in Mali has worked with two different consultants on developing its M&E framework. Both have recommended a different way of dealing with the idea of impact. One has focused on a list of indicators, another has abolished that and focused on household case studies. To make matters more confusing, the cooperating institution has a different opinion yet again. Just after developing an elaborate questionnaire for tracking impact on several case study households, the cooperating institution told the project that the project should not invest in assessing impact. This should be done only by an impartial external evaluation team or organisation. It is no wonder that project management is left wondering whose ideas to follow.

To limit conflicting advice, ask the consultant to:

- read all key material produced by previous consultant(s);
- spend time with project and partner staff to clarify what was found useful from the previous consultant(s) and what is now needed;
- make sure that the consultant’s contribution builds on what has been found useful so far and that she/he explicitly states how the existing elements of M&E fit with her/his contribution.

But it may already be too late. Before you know it, you are looking at vastly different sets of advice. First and foremost, use your own judgement on what will work for you in your context. You might find it helpful to come up with a cost estimate and technical capacity assessment for the more complicated recommendations consultants make. Second, refer to relevant sections in this Guide for guidance on what is considered good practice.

**Project Sustainability and Technical Assistance**

Working with technical assistance (TA), even more than with consultants, requires careful thought to avoid TA leaving a lack of sustainability. TA is often appointed for several years to implement and be responsible for the work plan. In one project, M&E staff were experiencing problems integrating M&E into the project. A TA team arrived and was able to connect the M&E staff with project management effectively. But the TA team also took on many M&E tasks and reports written without much input from local M&E staff. Applying a long-term perspective, the TA input might have been organised more effectively to build local capacity.
7.5 Organising the Project’s System for Managing Information

7.5.1. Why an Information System Is Vital

Typical IFAD-supported projects are large initiatives, in terms of numbers of primary stakeholders to be reached, geographic coverage, types of activities, budgets, time frame and sometimes number of staff. Keeping track of relevant information means that memory and handwritten notes alone will never be enough for those responsible for management or M&E. Furthermore, several people/partners may wish to use the data at different moments for different aspects of the work. The quantity of information that is collected and shared justifies some form of information system that stores data and makes it accessible to others. A participatory process is also vital. Documentation provides the foundation for interactive communication, transparency, consensus-building and continuity.

Information storage is needed at two levels – impact-related to guide the project strategy and progress-related to track operations. The focus of most M&E-related information systems is on registering indicator-related information to assess progress with implementing the logframe. In addition, AWPBs often include formats to track information on operational aspects, such as personnel issues, vehicle use and accounts (see Box 7-17). To store this range of information, from survey data to copies of contracts and correspondence, will probably require different information storage systems (see Box 17-18).

Box 17-17. Information for clarity of responsibility

The PDR-San project in Mali keeps track of all correspondence in which the project requests something of its implementing partners in order to monitor the decision-making process and its timing. This has been useful in analysing where bottlenecks were occurring and correcting them. It has also been very helpful during supervision missions to show that in several significant cases delays were not caused by project management but by one of the partners. This included a delay of more than one year in contracting the M&E consultant that the project badly wanted.

Box 17-18. Aspects to include in the management information system of WUPAP, Nepal (extract from project document)

Within the first six months, the programme will establish a comprehensive MIS (management information system) to provide:

- intranet with email facility and a database application for storing M&E data, reports and records;
- a filing and documentation system for efficient tracking of documents and a library to store programme documents and written and audio-visual records for reference;
- software and hardware support.

7.5.2. Setting Up a Computerised Information System

The information system of your project will consist of paper-based archives as well as computerised databases. As the latter are often not as well structured, this section focuses on how to go about setting up a computerised information system.

Computers can make a critical contribution to tracking and using data but are no panacea (see Table 7-9). Much time and effort is wasted in many projects on computerising data that is then never used. In Jordan and Ecuador, projects spent substantial amounts of resources and efforts to develop a computerised database system but relatively little effort in ensuring that it became functional. On the other hand, as a project in Tanzania learned, handling information coming in from several project components may be usefully computerised to extract higher-level findings on, say, cost effectiveness or efficiency of an intervention.
Be clear about what will be stored on paper. For example, what will you do with interview notes? With copies of maps or matrix rankings (if you use participatory diagramming methods)? With geographic maps? These cannot always be placed on computers, although software options for this are growing.

The larger the number of people who need to use the same data for different kinds of analysis, the more useful it is to computerise it on a network. But this is only true if they have easy access to the network and the information on it. In deciding when, where and what information needs to be computerised, this should be located as close to the field as possible to avoid mishaps with or loss of raw data, to enable data aggregation but above all to facilitate access for data inputting and use.

Achieving impact certainly does not depend on computerising data. Information that needs to be shared can also be photocopied and circulated, with each recipient using a common filing system. Further, some projects may find themselves in a culture that doesn’t keep written records of activities, such as the KAEMP project in Tanzania. The project team there had to start by training participants in keeping farm records and writing notes, rather than investing in systems and training for computerising data. Other projects have resisted computerisation as it means having to become more transparent and undergo more checking. Changing this requires sensitivity.

When developing computerised system, it is paramount that this is not divorced from management information needs. This can occur if software is used with which management staff are not comfortable and which relies on more junior level expertise.

Table 7-9. Benefits and drawbacks of incorporating computer systems as part of project M&E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Makes it necessary to define M&amp;E indicators and variables in highly precise terms.</td>
<td>• Systems are inflexible to changes in indicators and units of analysis; methods are not straightforward to integrate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides precise information with different levels of aggregation.</td>
<td>• Quantitative measures may dominate over qualitative measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduces the amount of time usually required to process data, so increases time available for analysis.</td>
<td>• Analysis may be very mechanical if it is limited to producing reports via standardised computer programmes, limiting reading to these existing report formats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitates timely access to information by various groups and creates conditions necessary for improving those groups’ analytical capabilities.</td>
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The process of setting up the information system has eight steps. These steps will be iterative, particularly in situations where M&E is being set up with project stakeholders. A system needs to be adapted as information needs in particular become clearer for the stakeholders, which is rarely possible in one go to the degree needed for a computerised database.

1. Define what you want to store in the information system and for which purpose. Section 5 discusses in detail how to decide what to monitor and evaluate.

2. Define your basic network structure (see Figure 7-1 as an example), analysing how and when the database will be used and by whom. This will strongly determine the design and timing of data inputting and analysis. Ask all project and partner staff: “Who needs to have access to what information and who needs to input data?”

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3. Identify how you plan to process the information, who will do it and what forms you need for this. As previously mentioned, locate this at the lowest possible level to make it easier for people collecting the data to analyse them. This also limits distortions in data analysis.

4. Compare and decide on options of existing software and hardware (network). Keep in mind that data inputting should be relatively easy to do for those responsible, that data access must be in the right place at the right time in the right form for the users, and that the system needs to be within the financial and technical means of project and implementing partners. This means that a decision must be arrived at with all involved. You have two options, each with advantages and disadvantages (see Table 7-10): (1) basic existing spreadsheets and database structures, such as Excel and Access (both part of Word Office) and (2) custom-designed software.

Table 7-10. Comparing existing and custom-made software

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Existing Software</th>
<th>Custom-Designed Software</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong></td>
<td>• Relatively cheap (purchase of licences, purchase of hardware, training, supplies)</td>
<td>• Specific to the data needs of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easily available</td>
<td>• Can be made accessible to all levels, e.g., by working with icons rather than words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easily adaptable by the project and often relatively easy to master</td>
<td>• More expensive (design personnel, purchase of licences, purchase of hardware, specialist training sessions, supplies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interchangeable/Compatible with others</td>
<td>• Needs time and expertise to develop, test, refine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More well-known</td>
<td>• The more specific, the more difficult to adapt at later stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Con:</strong></td>
<td>• Less flexible and less suited to specific project needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7-1. Example of defining the network and its connections (from WUPAP, Nepal)**
Largely due to budgetary restrictions, the PADEMER project in Colombia does not use an automated information system or a beneficiary database. Instead, it simply extracts information from implementation and impact reports and stores this on Excel spreadsheets. A project in India established a simple data-handling system without a central network. Instead, district units were equipped well enough to provide the monthly progress reports on diskette or by email. This information was used to track project progress throughout the region.

If you decide to contract a consultant to custom make your system, be sure the purchased or designed software can be used flexibly during the project life, since information needs are guaranteed to change. One project in Mali is planning its computer system around the assumption that data to be stored will stay the same for many years. This will pose increasingly serious problems for M&E officers as time proceeds and information needs change. Box 7-19 describes one software programme to aid with monitoring annual work plans.

Box 7-19. ASISTENTE - a programme from Latin America for annual work plan monitoring

ASISTENTE is software that monitors activities and results set out in the logframe and annual work plan (AWP). It developed out of a project in Guatemala that needed to handle: a large, isolated and ethnically diverse region; servicing many stakeholder groups; diverse stakeholder involvement in project implementation and receipt of information; and decentralised services to farmer organisations. The current version of ASISTENTE has been adapted for use in all Latin American projects. Specific characteristics of ASISTENTE are:

- Versatile: it can be used in diverse analysis contexts of the project AWP, including project components, results of operational plans, beneficiary services and users of the monitoring system.
- Multi-purpose: it operates on various local/satellite computers where monitoring information is inputted and local reports produced. A central computer consolidates information sent by the satellite computers to produce consolidated reports. Information is available for all stakeholders.
- User-friendly: information is inputted once to be processed to obtain diverse reports. This requires no specialised training and is relatively quick, since the programme uses icons and legends that are activated with a mouse. Reports produced are numbered and with graphics and so are accessible to many people. Reports can first be checked on screen prior to printing or filing and they can be reformatted for insertion in other documents or reports.
- Safe: restricted access profiles defined by the supervisor avoid mishandling of inputted data. Each user is assigned a name, password and access profile, and is only able to save and modify her/his own information and generate her/his own reports. Users do not have access to information saved by others nor can they generate reports by other users without authorisation. The system supervisor has the right to configure terminals and users, input and modify information, generate all reports and assign passwords.

Complementary software, also emerging from the Guatemala project and based on the same elements as above, is called DIRECTORIO (Programme for the Registration and Monitoring of Primary Stakeholders, Social Organisations and Implementing Organisations). It is for information on identification of and impact on primary stakeholders, their local organisations and implementing organisations. The majority of projects held this information, but usually not organised in a useful way. DIRECTORIO stores information related to:

- number of primary stakeholders and their productive activities;
- number of men and women;
- place of residence and age;
- services offered and number of primary stakeholders receiving each service;
- implementing organisations offering services;
- effects and impact achieved.

DIRECTORIO can hold a complete register of the primary stakeholders, rural organisations and implementing organisations, incorporate a gender focus and the concept of stakeholder services, input and monitor indicators on effect and impact on the primary and other stakeholders, generate various types of numerical and graphic reports, and classify data by project and by region.
5. With your preferred option in mind, undertake a more focused data management analysis, talking with everyone from the secretaries to the responsible ministry about information needs and uses and what people’s roles are in data management. This communication is needed to ensure that the system you have in mind is capable of dealing with the precise information and reporting needs.

6. Establish the formats needed for database entry and keep them in line with those for gathering information. Think about how you will store qualitative and quantitative information. Do not develop precise data formats until you are completely clear on what needs to be computerised.

7. Provide user training on the system, otherwise it might never get used optimally. The ongoing storing, updating and accessing of computerised information take skills that require user training and follow-up support from an accessible professional. Training includes those personnel involved in designing field data collection materials. In a project in India, for example, training for data entry was given at the start of field implementation. However, staff responsible for monitoring at the overall-project level were not included in the training. This, together with problems in data quality and data checking, meant the impact studies requested by the supervision missions still weren’t available by the time of the mid-term review. In another project, in Malawi, many M&E functions were carried out at the national level, such as an agricultural survey and household survey, the results of which were computerised. However, when it came to analysing the results, the M&E sections at the divisional level did not have the documentation on the software used, and thus analysis was delayed.

8. Adjust the system regularly by evaluating critically with the users what information is being used by whom, what is not, what problems exist, and whether other people need to or would like to have access to information.

7.6 Finances and Resources to Operate the M&E System

7.6.1. Budget Items to Consider

To be effective, the M&E functions need to be supported with a realistic and clear budget. Knowing what to include in M&E budgets is not always as clear cut as in other areas of the project, as many M&E functions and activities overlap with implementation and management activities. For example, management meetings where M&E information is discussed and analysed – is this a management cost or an M&E cost?

While it does not matter where such costs are allocated, it is critical to include them, make clear that they are for M&E purposes and be clear about who can decide how to use the M&E budget. However, do avoid putting all M&E under the heading “project management” as this makes it very unclear what is available for the M&E. The M&E budget – wherever it might be allocated – needs to cover the items listed in Table 7-11.
Table 7-11. Items to consider in an M&E budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Specific Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Contracts: consultants/external expertise (fees and travel expenses) | • Developing a detailed M&E plan  
• Establishing monitoring mechanisms and formats  
• Establishing information management systems  
• Facilitating review workshops  
• Conducting specific survey or monitoring work  
• Assisting with capturing and documenting lessons learned  
• Training and capacity-building (workshops, courses)  
• Impact assessment studies (e.g., baseline studies)  
• Mid-term and final external evaluations |
| Physical non-contractual investment costs | • Equipment for monitoring  
• Communications and presentation equipment  
• Establishment of M&E offices (e.g., furniture, equipment)  
• Publication materials  
• Computers and software  
• Vehicles |
| Training and study tours for M&E-related capacity-building | External and on-site training courses:  
• Training of primary stakeholders to build capacity in M&E  
• Training of selected implementing partners concerned with community development on introducing and supporting participatory monitoring  
• Training selected M&E staff of service providers (government and NGO) on relevant M&E aspects  
• Training M&E officers and key management staff on M&E, including computer training  
• Financial management training, as appropriate  
• Promoting exchange of experiences with other projects, among the different stakeholder groups  
• Course fees |
| Labour costs:  
• Recurrent – permanent staff salaries, temporary support staff  
• Investment – technical assistance (short- or long-term, national, international) | • Planning and developing the M&E system  
• Conducting regular monitoring  
• Report writing and analysis  
• Participating in review processes and events  
• Information management  
• Capturing and documenting lessons learned  
• Disseminating M&E findings  
• Supporting community based/participatory M&E processes |
| Non-labour operational costs | • Vehicle fuel and maintenance and other transport  
• Office running costs (overheads, maintenance)  
• Stationery  
• Meetings  
• Allowances for primary stakeholders and project implementers  
• External data, such as maps  
• Communication and publication costs – printing/copying documents, editing, layout and publication of key documents  
Specific evaluation events (M&E planning workshops, review workshops, field survey work, stakeholder consultations, specific monitoring activities, mid-term and final external evaluations):  
• Venue costs  
• Advertising materials  
• Accommodation  
• Attendance fees and course fees |
7.6.2 Levels of Allocation

While there are no fixed rules for this, M&E budgets range from 2% to 15% of all costs. In projects, such as MARENASS in Peru and FODESA in Mali, where the stakeholders are exploring new ways of working together, M&E budgets are likely to be proportionally higher since more time is needed for reflection on what works. Table 7-12 shows the budget line for five Latin American projects, including MARENASS.

Note that each project clusters its M&E costs in different ways due to the different approaches adopted. M&E in MARENASS is decentralised and sub-contracted. Therefore the project coordination itself does not need vehicles or materials for M&E. However, clustering all M&E costs under “studies” makes it necessary for the budget to be accompanied by a detailed M&E plan to ensure clarity about how the funds are to be allocated.

Regardless of how the M&E budget is calculated, it will always overlap to some degree with other project activities. For example, about 78% of total annual funds for the MARENASS project goes directly to farmers’ management of their own community development plans, with the remainder going to two components: project management and M&E. Yet, even within these two components, many costs were related to community development such as festivals, communication bulletins and so on, raising this figure to 82-85%. Therefore, do not detail the M&E budget excessively. Much learning occurs through the normal interactions of project implementation. What is most important is to ensure inclusion in the budget of the events, procedures and staff time that support project learning and reflection.

Many projects experience funding delays at start-up. To deal with this, financial advances are available from IFAD through the Special Operations Facility (SOF). These grants have proven to be extremely useful in expediting project start-up and implementation. The Philippine government, for example, administered such a grant to facilitate staff interview and recruitment, the start-up workshop and purchase of equipment. Other uses of SOF grants include engaging a project expediter to assist with fulfilment of conditions for loan effectiveness and financing training in management systems. Many projects use the SOF to cover initial M&E costs, such as M&E training for staff and partners and preparing baseline studies.

Table 7-12. M&E budgets for five projects in Latin America, compared to total project budget, from appraisal reports (in United States dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Country and project</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Equador</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments: jeep 4x4, computer equipment, furniture and office equipment</td>
<td>PROSALFA</td>
<td>PRODECOP</td>
<td>SARAGURO</td>
<td>MARENASS</td>
<td>PRODECOP IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20,800</td>
<td>28,830</td>
<td>27,950</td>
<td>24,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running costs: salaries, travel, materials, maintenance, insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td>144,900</td>
<td>346,485</td>
<td>213,010</td>
<td>227,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies: baseline, evaluation studies, documentation, monitoring, publications, taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td>205,000</td>
<td>540,000</td>
<td>119,916</td>
<td>1,770,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total M&amp;E</td>
<td></td>
<td>370,700</td>
<td>915,315</td>
<td>360,876</td>
<td>1,770,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total project</td>
<td></td>
<td>26,742,700</td>
<td>24,365,000</td>
<td>16,753,781</td>
<td>19,142,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of M&amp;E</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.6.3 Costs and Resources for Participatory M&E and Selected M&E Activities

From a budget perspective, participatory learning processes are more time intensive than those in which only a few people are involved. Time is needed to organise meetings with larger numbers of people and more diverse groups and to reach agreement on how to proceed with M&E or on what data mean. Perhaps it will be necessary to invest in training both project and implementing partner staff in facilitation skills and also in training primary stakeholders in, for example, impact assessment methods and developing local indicators. Some projects have found that capacity-building on participatory M&E tasks can be undertaken on a cost-sharing basis, but usually the project bears the full cost.

Specific budget items to consider for more participatory forms of M&E are:

- specific training for staff in participatory techniques and participatory M&E;
- extra meetings with stakeholders for designing M&E;
- additional meetings for local-level analysis;
- short training workshops on key steps in designing M&E and specific elements such as indicators and methods (including using the logframe matrix).

Participatory projects also require ongoing planning processes to determine what will be implemented for whom and with whom. In cases where project activities emerge, the M&E budget needs similar flexibility. Therefore the budget could include a contingency line for significant but unanticipated opportunities. Often, the items in an M&E budget are sufficiently broad that they can be used for diverse types of M&E activities. For example, including a budget line “participatory impact assessment” leaves the project with much flexibility about when and how to undertake this.

Boxes 7-20, 7-21 and 7-22 show examples of how to go about calculating costs for specific M&E activities: a baseline study, participatory impact monitoring and the management information system. Note that these costs are not intended to be indicative. Your costs will depend on context-specific factors, such as the size of the geographic area, local labour costs, sample size, type of methodology, use of external expertise, etc.

Box 7-20. Provincial baseline study in China (2000)

| Total cost | USD 13,173 |
| Activity | 1,200 household interviews in 37 project areas in seven counties; data entry cost = USD 10.98 per interview |
| Personnel | For interviews: two full-time staff per project area = 74 staff  
For data management: two full-time staff per county = 14 staff  
For managing/reporting: one province-level consultant |
| Time schedule | Interviews: two weeks  
Data entry: ten days  
Data checking, aggregating, analysing: two weeks  
Reporting: two weeks |

Total cost of introducing PIM per project = USD 15,000. This includes: consultants’ fees, training workshop materials and follow-up assistance.

This cost can be reduced by:

a) training and employing local experts to act as facilitators and consultants;
b) integrating PIM activities into ongoing planning, extension and M&E activities;
c) cleaning up existing data “cemeteries” and substituting more expressive impact-related information for fewer columns of figures;
d) accepting reliable statements on trends rather than insisting on statistical accuracy.

Box 7-22. Costs for setting up the management information system in Nepal (2001)

Total cost of setting up the management information system: NPR (Nepalese rupees) 1,719,239, spread over four years, with 43% of this for the first year, when procurement costs are high. Total expenditure, per item is:

- Server software 255,500
- Email server software 73,000
- Proxy server software 43,800
- Network hub and cables 21,900
- Installation 51,100
- Internet dial-up charges 169,859
- Dial-up networking phone charges from districts and project unit 636,970
- Purchase of publications and media for library 212,323
- Network maintenance contract 254,788

At the time of writing the document, the exchange rate was 1 USD per 75 NPR (April 2001).
Further Reading


List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Managing for Impact in Rural Development

A Guide for Project M&E
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Key Messages

- M&E data will only help the project if it is used in structured critical reflections with relevant stakeholders.
- Critical reflection requires asking “Why?” “So what?” and “Now what?” after your M&E data show what has happened.
- Reflections can happen in any forum – formal or informal – with key individuals and groups, with project and partner staff and primary stakeholders, in national steering groups and local committees. But it will only happen if you actively seek to understand the three questions above.
- Clarity of insight and decisions will often come from a sequence of reflections with different stakeholders. Plan how you will integrate your learning events.
- Regular identification of “lessons learned” helps you to systematise project experiences so you can decide on improvements that increase impact. “Lessons learned” are also critical to help others benefit from your problems and successes.
- Annual project reviews with stakeholders are essential moments to reflect and refocus so it’s possible to return to implementation with more clarity and consensus about how to redress problems and build on successes.
- External events, such as supervision missions and mid-term evaluations or reviews, are valuable moments to see the project through different eyes and identify strategic improvements.

This Section is useful for:

- Managers – to use M&E information for guiding project implementation and making decisions, and to engage all stakeholders in joint analysis, learning and decision making;
- M&E staff – to encourage reflective use of information by implementers and engage key stakeholders in joint analysis of information;
- Consultants – to build critical reflection into M&E processes.
8.1 An Overview of Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

8.1.1 What Is Critical Reflection?

Critical reflection in a project means interpreting experiences and data to create new insights and agreement on actions. Without critical reflection, your M&E data will not help you to manage for impact (see Section 2). Active discussion during team meetings and in meetings with primary stakeholders are vital if M&E information is to be shared, analysed and acted upon.

Making analysis “critical” means moving beyond collecting, processing and reviewing data. After asking “what is happening”, also discuss:

- “Why is it happening?”
- “So what are the implications for the project?”
- “Now what do we do next?”

If you manage to discuss these questions regularly with project stakeholders, then you are well on the road to reflecting critically.

Reflecting critically means questioning what is normally taken for granted, particularly project assumptions (column 4 of the logframe matrix, Section 3). This requires reflecting on what did not work or is not working. The project objective hierarchy is based on assumptions about the context and the likely effect of project activities. Only time will tell if these assumptions are valid or not as it will become clear what has and has not worked. Learning from what did not have the desired effect enables you to adjust your mental model of how the project works and work with more valid assumptions.

8.1.2 The Importance of Critical Reflection for M&E

Normally, relatively little attention is invested by projects in critical reflection. Most M&E efforts and resources are spent on collecting data, statistical analysis and basic reporting of activities. This has several causes (also see Section 1). Data collection is more mechanical and requires less capacity. M&E is often seen as a bureaucratic obligation requested in the contract and by government regulations and not as valuable to the project. No one seems to think they gain from frank analysis of under-performing projects. Reversing such views requires building capacity, sensitisation and putting in place effective incentives (see Section 7).
The following dialogue shows how embedded a non-reflective approach can be in M&E. The dialogue took place in Bangladesh between an M&E consultant (C) and a sector coordinator (X)¹:

C: “What purpose do the weekly reports serve that you request of the district coordinators?”
X: “It is policy that they must send reports weekly.”
C: “Yes but what purpose is the policy serving?”
X: “To encourage them to work harder and to inform higher management.”
C: “Higher management does not have the time to read weekly reports and the district coordinators are being paid to work hard. Why do you ask them to give you weekly reports?”
X: “When they know that they are being watched, they will pressure their thana managers to work harder.”
C: “They are already pressuring their staff hard. You can find the results in the monthly reports. Why do you need weekly reports?”
X: “To inform higher management.”

Focusing on producing data because someone wants it rather than analysing it critically in order to learn from it defeats the purpose of M&E. Project stakeholders can only improve their actions by reflecting regularly on data, planning moments for such reflection and taking time to learn lessons. Decisions need to be documented and shared with those concerned. Managers need to check that decisions have been implemented as agreed. Then you can say that learning has taken place.

8.1.3 Reflective Events in a Learning Sequence

Project M&E involves an extensive series of potentially reflective events – from weekly team meetings and informal sessions to the more formal supervision missions and mid-term reviews/evaluations. These events, whether self-organised or externally initiated, occur alongside data gathering. During these events, project stakeholders can use the data gathered to indicate areas of improvement.

Learning does not happen in one sitting. It evolves, starting with individuals raising important issues and questioning assumptions through group-based analyses (see Box 8-1) that bring out different perspectives and information inputs. So you will need to plan “learning” as a series of events. Knowing how to structure the sequence is important (see Box 8-2). The optimal sequence of learning events follows reporting lines and hierarchies of decision making.

Box 8-1. The advantage of critical reflection in groups

- To uncover new information – by sharing ideas with others, individuals’ memories can be triggered and new information and more refined insights can emerge.
- To limit biases – a thorough and critical discussion about information (impressions and data) means it is crosschecked and people can point out when they feel an issue has been represented incorrectly.
- To build a clear picture of a situation/event/process and reach consensus – by discussing data, contradictions and gaps can be identified and can be understood or filled.
- To ensure well-reasoned, meaningful actions – joint analysis of, for example, the number of people experiencing food shortages, can reveal the structural causes of problems and solutions and so lead to more focused project reactions.
- To facilitate action that has broad ownership – the more people who understand the causes and extent of problems and how they relate to aspirations, the more this can motivate people to invest in making changes happen.

But don’t rely only on groups and be sure to structure them well. Groups can also inhibit sharing. Compose groups in such a way that sharing is possible for those who are shy and relatively marginalised.

As project manager or M&E officer, you will no doubt find that project stakeholders have different levels of ability and willingness to reflect critically on their practice. You cannot force people to engage in a change-oriented learning process but you can put in place some simple opportunities that encourage it. Sections 8.2 and 8.3 discuss concrete ideas for stimulating individual reflection and reflective events, while 7.3 offers ideas on putting in place incentives.

An important moment in the learning sequences is when lessons are identified. Project and partner staff are continually learning, sometimes unconsciously, what to improve and changing their everyday actions accordingly. Sometimes it is useful to systematise this learning in the form of “lessons learned”. A lesson learned can have an internal audience – the project and partners themselves – as well as an external audience consisting of other projects, other funding agencies, IFAD and so forth. Their value for projects that are managing for impact is outlined in Box 8-3.

Lessons for internal learning are particularly important when a project is innovative or for external learning after several years of implementation. PADEMER, in Colombia, is an example of an experimental project. Its appraisal report explicitly states the role of lessons learned: “Given the project’s pilot nature in terms of experience, the evaluation function will place special importance on reviewing lessons of implementation, when informing the expansion of activities into new areas.” For TNWDP (India), lessons were identified in its completion report and they focused on nine themes: an enabling environment, group formation and cohesion, NGOs, targeting, training, income-generating activities, marketing, financial operations and executing agency.

Section 8.2.2 describes how to undertake a “lessons learned” exercise.
8.2 How to Encourage Critical Reflection

8.2.1 Starting with Individual Reflection

Learning starts with the individual. One critically reflective and innovative staff member can make a considerable difference in a project (see Box 8-4). Your management style will strongly determine whether or not project staff and staff from implementing partners and primary stakeholders will feel free to initiate and participate in similar types of learning exercises.

If individuals do not reflect during their work on their own, then they will probably find it difficult during group events, such as annual project reviews or monthly meetings with implementing partners. While not everyone is equally capable or interested in developing a reflective working style, everyone can start somewhere.

Box 8-4. Facilitated self-evaluation of cooperatives in Morocco

Lubna Khalil works with the SPA (Service de la Production Agriculture) in Morocco. On her own, without support from project management, she initiated a process of organisational self-evaluation with nine of the cooperatives in one area. The process started by bringing together the administrative staff of the cooperatives to discuss some issues they are facing in their work. The first meeting focused on problems of financial accountability and the tenure of the administrative staff.

The meetings offered an opportunity for administrative staff to analyse problems and offer solutions based on their understanding of the local situations. Lubna provided facilitation support as well as technical assistance in areas where the staff did not feel comfortable, such as designing monitoring forms and formats for cooperative activities like vehicle maintenance and supervision. The meetings between administrative staff of the different cooperatives have become regular. The meetings are also held when a particular problem arises that requires more time and effort.

Although the process has just started, there are already some visible positive impacts on organisational effectiveness and efficiency:

- Purchase of computers to assist in financial and other types of accountability
- Training of cooperative administrative staff in the Moroccan laws that govern cooperatives
- Training of cooperative administrative staff in financial bookkeeping, resulting in improved financial accountability
- Improvements in the staff contracts to improve protection of both the staff and the cooperatives
- Restoring or creating a monitoring system for management, e.g., a monthly check on vehicle status and finances

Simple practical steps can make a significant difference in encouraging individual reflection in project staff and in staff of partner organisations.

- Including the expectation of review and reflection in job descriptions and TOR and memoranda of understanding. You can include a clause such as the following in a job description: “The postholder is expected to review regularly (at least once a year) his/her performance with the direct manager, with the intention of identifying areas for improvement.” In a memorandum of understanding with an implementing partner or primary stakeholder group, stipu-

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Box 8-3. The value of sharing lessons learned

- Present successful alternative development models, for planning and replication purposes, that have been analysed well and documented and are based on practical field experiences.
- Facilitate others in learning from our mistakes, thereby helping them to avoid making similar errors.
- Permit others to learn from the problems that were encountered in the project - and how they were solved.
- Increase the project’s impact by positively influencing organisational policies and the design and implementation of other projects. For example, IFAD project proposals include a section “Lessons Learned from Previous IFAD Experiences”.
- Promote networking by exchanging knowledge and information, thereby increasing cooperation among different organisations.

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2 IFAD/ANGOC (2001), see Further Reading.
late that not only will raw data be reported, but also the implications of the information for action are to be given. Make explicit the expectation that partner staff participate in regular workshops to assess implications for action.

- Encouraging reporting that asks staff for their opinions. In the TROPISEC project, Nicaragua, the implementing partner has introduced three monitoring tools: the community promoter’s notebook, the notebook of the assistant soil conservationist and the extension agent’s agenda. Staff elaborate their monthly reports directly in the notebook or agenda. They note down field activities developed, primary stakeholders assisted, achievements, problems and proposed solutions.

- Regularly asking project stakeholders their views. This means not just at formal meetings but also in chance encounters to stimulate people to form and share opinions. Ask what surprises they have encountered, what innovations they have tried out and what changes they would like to see in the project. In TROPISEC, Nicaragua, it is a requirement that “each technician or professional of the [management unit] must have as an annual purpose the capitalisation of at least one experience to exchange with other colleagues”.

- Providing constructive feedback. If you are managing others, give positive reinforcement about what you like and constructive criticism about what could be improved (see Box 8-5).

**Box 8-5. Formulating constructive feedback**

- Specific rather than general: “You missed this morning’s meeting,” rather than, “You never bother to come to our meetings.”
- Tentative rather than absolute: “You seem unconcerned about this problem,” rather than, “You don’t care what happens.” It also helps to present negative feedback as something that is your own problem, rather than their fault (“I felt upset when you…”).
- Suggesting rather than directing: “Have you ever considered talking to him directly about this?” rather than, “Go talk to him.”
- Tied to behaviour rather than abstract: “You complain frequently,” rather than, “You are immature.”
- Timely, since looking back to something that happened several days or weeks ago is difficult for people.

- Seeking feedback from the people you deal with, if you are a manager, to set an example. Be open about wanting to receive feedback from staff and other stakeholders. Share your own feelings, observations and concerns. Act on emerging problems as soon as possible. You will not always have the right answers, nor will you be expected to have them, so involve stakeholders in problem solving.

- Valuing field visits and exchange visits. As soon as project staff in Colombia started field monitoring visits to monitor implementation by the partners, they became better acquainted with primary stakeholders. It allowed for better insights into issues close to the ground and initiated much discussion about indicators of success. A fixed number of monitoring visits have become institutionalised as part of project M&E. Another kind of visits are exposure visits where project stakeholders visit other similar projects to learn how they are innovating and dealing with implementation problems.

- Rewarding critical reflection. See Section 7.3 on “incentives” for learning.

### 8.2.2 Capturing Lessons Learned with Project Stakeholders

Learning needs to be systematised. Accidental learning happens all the time but is not the most efficient way to learn nor does it necessarily lead to improved actions. Increasing successes and avoiding pitfalls is best when conscious efforts are made to learn lessons.

A lesson learned is defined as “the knowledge derived from experience that is sufficiently well founded and can be generalised so that it has the potential to improve action”. Many projects and organisations talk about the importance of identifying such lessons. But in practice, few
are able to identify lessons that actually help improve actions. Two examples of lessons from IFAD-supported projects illustrate how to include an action orientation (see Box 8-6).

**Box 8-6. Lessons learned in Colombia and India**

- In Colombia’s PADEMER project, one of the lessons learned was that it is good practice when contracting out services to spell out the exact commitments and responsibilities of each actor, stipulating the information that should be reported in terms of effects and impacts, and establishing clear, concrete mechanisms to insist on this. This was not done with the implementing partner that had been contracted to undertake monitoring. It only reported on achievement of activities, leaving the project empty-handed in terms of information on impact.

- In the TNWDP project in India, an important lesson learned about NGOs was: “The capacity and performance of NGOs is critical to the continuing success of self-help groups, especially in the early stages of group formation.” A related lesson that could ensure the performance of NGOs was: “the importance of rigorous screening procedures to select committed and capable NGOs that are driven primarily by the desire to improve the well-being of people at the grassroots level”.

**How to distil lessons learned**

“Lessons learned” events are not daily occurrences. The frequency with which lessons are identified will be less than weekly or monthly team meetings. In some projects, the team and partners identify lessons at annual project reviews, at mid-term reviews and again at completion. If you want to have an active learning organisation, then including lessons as part of the annual review is a good idea. Waiting until the end of the project will mean wasting many potential learning opportunities.

A lessons-learned event can take several days of intense discussion and must be prepared well. In the planning, answer these six questions with other key stakeholders before you start:

1. What do we mean by a “lesson learned”?
2. Why do we want to identify lessons?
   - For reporting (to primary stakeholders, partners, to funding agencies)?
   - To learn for ourselves for a next phase of the work?
   - To deal with a crisis?
   - As a strategy to support fundraising (by being able to report on lessons)?
3. For whom are these lessons and, accordingly, how are they best shared (written, verbal, video, drama, etc.)?
4. Whose lessons are they – primary stakeholders, field workers, management? And, therefore, who should we involved in identifying the lessons?
5. What are the lessons – per stakeholder group (source and audience)? And how do we prioritise them if there are too many to share (see Box 8-7)? To narrow the discussion around key lessons, first decide on the themes or issues where most learning occurred or is needed.
6. How do we document the lessons and how do we link the lessons into the next phase of planning?
Box 8-7. Prior selection of your themes for lessons-learned events

In an IUCN (World Conservation Union) integrated natural resource management project in Tanzania, a lessons-learned event after phase one and prior to phase two focused on eight key themes:

1. Participatory resource assessments and socio-economic profiles
2. Supporting community resource management plans
3. Making participation of key stakeholders possible
4. Building awareness, capacity and commitment
5. Community development fund
6. Integration of gender considerations
7. Decentralisation and coordination
8. Law enforcement

These were the main areas of methodological experimentation and innovation for the project and thus where it most needed to stop, reflect and learn in order to implement an improved phase two.

During the workshop, participants listed hundreds of potential lessons learned. To keep it manageable, they clustered lessons into three categories: critical for success, important for success or desirable (under the headings “Must Do”, “Should Do”, and “Could Do”). Only the “MUST DOs” were documented. Part of this entailed a discussion on which lessons were specific to the project area or only to Tanzania and which would be widely applicable.

Formulating a lesson learned

To formulate a useful lesson, consider the following.

- Include a generalised principle that can be applied in other situations. Do not write the lesson only as an observation, description or a recommendation that lacks justification.

- Explain the lesson in the context of the project. For it to be useful to others, they need to understand the situation in which it occurred. Otherwise, they will not know if the lesson might be appropriate for them or useful. Relating the lesson to one (or more) assumption(s) on which the project is based can help others understand what exactly has been learned.

- Justify the lesson with proof of why it is valid. But if it is a hypothetical lesson, test it. Do not rely on it without ensuring it is valid.

- Check that the lesson is not too general or too specific to be useful.

Document the “lesson learned” with at least these five elements.

a. Theme of “lessons learned”

The core question that the project asked itself due to a methodological innovation or problem encountered, or because it is a key theme of the project.

b. What was our original understanding or assumption?

A short description of the original understanding of the theme/question. This is what people assumed before the experiences on which they are now reflecting. For example, “We assumed, incorrectly, that there would enough women able to participate in the micro-enterprise training workshops.”

c. What is our revised understanding or assumption?

The new thinking about the original question/problem or the reworded assumption. Taking the example above, “We now know that we not only need to create interest in micro-enterprise training but also need to find ways to make it possible for women to attend the course.”
d. One or two examples that substantiate the new understanding

To be sure you have a high-quality lesson, you need to provide evidence that supports the proposed lesson learned. Only with multiple sources of proof will it be solid enough to apply in future. The greater the number of sources for a “lesson learned”, the more rigorous the supporting evidence. The more the evidence supports the lesson learned, the more confidence you can have in the lesson’s significance and meaningfulness. If you have only one type of evidence then you have a “lessons-learned hypothesis”. This will need to be tested and verified.

e. How the project came to this insight

Description of what triggered the project team to be challenged in its views and revise its understanding (Was it a crisis, monitoring data, a field observation that contradicted earlier ones, etc?).

8.2.3 Planning for an Integrated Sequence of Reflective Events

All projects have several routes for learning and decision making. These need to be interlinked if they are to be complementary and not duplicate efforts. In the example from Tanzania, in Box 8-8, each step in the sequence of meetings has its own mandate in terms of types of information shared and discussed and the types of action-decisions that it can make.

Box 8-8. Meetings at the appropriate level for useful action

In Tanzania, each of the levels of water users is involved in regular meetings to discuss and solve problems as they arise. The discussion of problems starts at the (irrigation) section level, with problems beyond the capacity of the section being sent to the block meeting and those beyond the capacity of the block to solve are sent to the association. The section meetings are informal, although meeting minutes are taken. The advantages of regular (normally monthly) section meetings noted by the Bahi Irrigation Scheme are:

- They are able to solve problems before they become too difficult to solve. For example, a damaged canal area can be repaired or replaced before the irrigation water causes more damage, requiring more money and technical expertise to repair.
- The smaller numbers are easier to manage and administer. With 12-15 people from the same area, it is easy to call a meeting and notify members. If the meetings were too big, then they would be less effective. Sometimes the meetings even take place in the field so local members do not have to travel far to meet.
- Because the section is the nucleus, then even the demonstrations and trials are easy to establish so that others can learn. People can move easily to the demonstrations.

Knowing how to construct a useful learning sequence is a skill that must be learned. This may require some trial, error and innovation. The optimal sequence of learning events follows levels of aggregation (see Box 8-9), reporting lines and hierarchies of decision making. Start a sequence at the lowest possible level where decisions are made (Box 8-10). If a decision must be made elsewhere or discussed with others, then link this into a sequence by feeding any lessons or conclusions from one discussion and decision forum to the other.

Sometimes you will need to include special evaluations in a learning sequence in order to fill a knowledge gap. For example, the WUPAP programme (Nepal) planned two human rights assessments as part of its M&E process. These will look at the extent to which the programme has promoted awareness of rights, advocacy, and how to improve the human rights situation for the next phase.

If you have a sequence of learning events in which conclusions are documented and passed to another decision body, provide feedback on any conclusions. If, for example, project management receives progress reports from implementing partners, provide them feedback on the quality of the reports and on how the information has been used. This is important not only

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to let partners know how information has helped influence decisions, but also to redirect them in what they include in reports. It can help move them away from giving lists of activities to reporting on results, problems and proposed solutions.

**Box 8-9. Linking in Bangladesh, ADIP planning for an integrated sequence of reflection and reporting events**

The reporting system of the ADIP project in Bangladesh functions well and reasonably meets the information needs of stakeholders: the implementing partners, NGOs, project management and IFAD. Monitoring and reporting is carried out relatively systematically through:

- quarterly data collection, compilation, consolidation and summary reporting;
- half-yearly and yearly data collection, compilation, consolidation and detailed reporting;
- special report on any issue of concern, at any time.

In addition, brief monthly reporting is being planned. The main flows of reporting were:

- data collected at the group or field level were forwarded to the municipal level for compilation and consolidation;
- data compiled at the municipal level were forwarded to the district level for consolidation and onward transmission;
- data compiled at the district level were forwarded to HQ (one copy to the concerned agency and one to management) for project consolidation and feedback.

Along with this, a feedback loop incorporated the following workshops and review meetings:

- review meeting with NGOs, bi-monthly;
- project management coordination committee meetings, bi-monthly;
- inter-ministerial project steering committee meetings, half-yearly;
- special review on extension activities, annually;
- supervision missions by IFAD for reviewing, including mid-term review, project performance with recommendations approved at feedback sessions and follow-up at consecutive supervision meetings.

**Box 8-10. Tiered learning in Tanzania**

In Tanzania’s PIDP project meetings are held at different levels of the irrigation system. Besides group meetings at the section level, there are “block meetings” and “association meetings”.

The section leaders bring progress information and problems that they cannot solve to the block meetings. These meetings are more formal and happen after the section meetings have been held (especially during the annual planning process). The block leaders oversee which sections are doing well or not. If the sections are not doing well, then they receive a warning. If the warning is not heeded, then the block leaders can forward the problem to the association level, which can fine or otherwise punish the section/individual according to the association’s by-laws. The block meetings are small so it is easier to make decisions and take action at this level than to wait until the general assembly.

There are three types of association meetings.

- The subcommittees of the association’s executive committee. The three subcommittees are the “workhorses” of the association: finance and planning, education, and water management. They meet about once a month to deal with problems that cannot be addressed at either the lower section or block levels.
- The quarterly executive committee. The executive committee reviews the progress of the subcommittees. It has a limited budget, which it can allocate without approval from the general assembly.
- The general assembly. Meeting three times a year, its responsibilities are to elect new leaders, discuss work plans and authorise the use of funds. Sometimes there are special agenda items concerning training or information dissemination.
8.3 Making M&E Events More Reflective

Critical reflection occurs in everyday planning, implementation and M&E activities. Each person involved in the project filters or changes information, prioritising and rejecting data continuously and often unconsciously. This happens in each informal chat, as well as during formal external missions.

Making a project reflective means planning more consciously when and how to deal critically with information. This is not just about ensuring you have one annual review with primary stakeholders. Box 8-11 illustrates how one IUCN (World Conservation Union) programme in Tanzania uses various elements to encourage ongoing and participatory critical reflection about its innovative collaborative coastal resource management initiative.

Box 8-11. Learning in the Tanga Coastal Zone Conservation and Development Programme, Tanzania (TCZCDP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General project conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Limited geographic area in phase one allowed for deeper analysis and more discussion with and feedback from communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working practices in the field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Frequent visits by a technical team to communities to help understand community reactions to project activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quick follow-up to problems and other issues that emerged in the pilot villages to allow for more feedback from communities and led to quicker learning about what did and didn’t work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quarterly village feedback meetings (with an evaluation aspect during discussions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biannual action plan reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Annual regional meetings with all stakeholder groups (that provide community reactions) to share progress and problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme team member attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Team open to feedback from each other; effort made to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attitude of programme team towards listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principle of building on local knowledge and local resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focused observations based on a clear plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not being afraid to try new ideas, because joint planning also means shared responsibility in case of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problems valued – not seen as mistakes but as learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme management mechanisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Universal monitoring – everyone monitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Joint planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enabling environment via open leadership and encouragement from the beginning of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regional steering committee for adaptive management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fortnightly team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participatory evaluations and reviews – with villagers, district teams, external evaluations and the project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Periodic, targeted (i.e., activity-focused) reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training to provide new knowledge and skills for the whole team – everyone having received training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ensuring documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Widespread documentation that is systematic, easy, and accessible (but not perfect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quarterly progress reports that include a section on lessons learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ad hoc external opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Opinions and ideas from visitors who are asked to share them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seminars and workshops run by partners and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A vocal public – partly encouraged by TCZCDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consultants’ recommendations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.3.1. Making Project Team Meetings Reflective

The critical contribution of the project team to overall success makes it worthwhile to invest in team meetings as an important opportunity for reflection. Project team members may include project staff, implementing partners and primary stakeholder representatives – this depends on how the project is structured. Team members are actively engaged in implementation, and reflecting on their experiences can contribute to refining implementation.

To make project meetings reflective, consider how to prepare for them, conduct them and follow them up.

**Before the meeting**

- Decide who should be at project meetings. Besides the core members, you might want to invite other stakeholders from time to time. If so, how often should they be invited?

- Agree on scheduling. Meetings must be long enough apart so that there is new material for reflection and yet frequent enough to allow for timely decisions to be made. Weekly meetings are common to most projects (see Box 8-12) but if other stakeholders are involved this may need to be less frequent. Monthly meetings with a different focus may be needed (see Box 8-13). For example, in Uganda, one project’s design has compartmentalised activities into components, with each component head responsible for monitoring the activities of that component. This has led to limited cross-linkages and poor learning across the components. Monthly meetings with component heads could focus on how the components interact and contribute together to the broader goals.

**Box 8-12. Weekly staff meetings in Tanzania PIDP**

The project team meeting is held each week with whoever is in the office, but is skipped if less than half the staff are available. The meetings focus on current issues, reviewing schedules and revising work plans as needed. The staff meetings run for about 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the issues. Staff share M&E reports from the fields and review recommendations. For example, in Lusille village, the water users’ association rejected the contractor because he was incompetent. The project team discussed this event. From this, they decided that all prospective contractors are to meet with the associations before a contract is signed. The association decides on the contractor after screening two or three potential contractors.

**Box 8-13. Monthly monitoring meetings with local organisations**

At monthly monitoring meetings in PIDP (Tanzania), members of formal and non-formal organisations present and analyse, among other issues, the summarised information concerning the project’s actions at the family and association levels. The data used come from family observation sheets that are filled in by extension staff or others responsible for monitoring. The extension staff used to avoid filling the sheets because they were bulky. So the formats have been simplified to facilitate use. The summarised information, plus agreements emerging from the meeting, are documented and delivered to the representative of the implementing partners.

- Agree what M&E findings are to be discussed. By putting outputs of M&E activities on the agenda, they are fed directly into decision-making forums. In PROCHALATE (El Salvador), meetings of the technical evaluation committee and evaluation workshops include a discussion on monitoring surveys. Management progress reports are a key agenda item in the meetings of the technical evaluation committee.

**During the meeting**

- Ensure everyone has the same agenda and that expectations are clear.

- To share responsibility, build skills and create a team spirit, you can rotate the chairing of the meeting. Each meeting could be prepared and facilitated by a different project team member.
• Ask staff to raise problems or dilemmas they are facing and invite everyone to find solutions.

• Most importantly, when someone raises a critical incident or issue of importance, encourage analysis on these four questions:
  - What did I/we do?
  - What does this mean?
  - Why did this happen?
  - How can I/we do things better in the future?

• At regular intervals, include constructive feedback exercises. Box 8-14 describes one exercise that is commonly used in groups.

Box 8-14. Constructive feedback using “Johari’s window”

This exercise can help increase self-awareness and trust in project teams, by helping people understand how their behaviour affects others. By getting feedback, people can help each other remove points of friction.

• Present Johari’s window, as below, clarifying the contents of each of the four squares and key terms as below.
  - Feedback. One way by which others make you see your own blind area, for example, how you sound or what impressions you make
  - Sharing. One way of opening yourself up more to others
  - Revelation. Suddenly seeing part of the unknown area of yourself – an experience that cannot be planned

• Ask those present to draw their own Johari’s window, filling in several examples in each box.

• Ask participants to discuss some of their examples.

• Ask participants to discuss in small groups why and how feedback is important in managing a project.

• If you are doing this in a several-day workshop, get the group to practise giving and receiving feedback, with five minutes set aside everyday for giving feedback in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to Self</th>
<th>Unknown to Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Known to others</td>
<td>OPEN KNOWLEDGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known to you by others and by you - your name, colour of hair, etc.</td>
<td>The part of you that is known to others but not to you - your tone of voice, a conflict in which you are involved or a trait, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unknown to others</th>
<th>HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE Sharing</th>
<th>KNOWLEDGE YET TO BE REVEALED Revelation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What you know of yourself but do not share with others. Some things may best remain hidden, but sharing with others might clear the air and build trust, making teamwork easier.</td>
<td>What is unknown to others and also to you about you. Here are talents and abilities that you do not know you have and others have never seen but are part of you and may one day appear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make sure outputs are action-oriented

• Document the meetings well. Focus on documenting “actions needed”, “person responsible for implementation”, “deadline” and “person responsible for follow-up”. Box 8-15 shows how PRODECOP follows up its analysis of actions needed to assess if the actions have been implemented or not.

It is good practice to share the draft minutes with all present to ensure that there is an accurate and complete record of what was agreed. Another common practice is to put the minutes of a previous meeting on the agenda of the next one to sort out any differences of opinion.

Distribute the minutes from the meetings to all relevant people as soon as possible after the meeting to ensure timely action.

### Box 8-15. Documenting the actions needed to ensure follow up (PRODECOP, Venezuela)

(E=excellent, VG=very good, G=good, M=minimum, D=deficient, NA=cannot be assessed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness identified</th>
<th>Improved action suggested</th>
<th>Implementation of suggestion</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>E VG G M D NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3.2 Reflecting with Stakeholder Groups

Many of the ideas outlined in 8.3.1 are equally applicable, not only to team meetings but also to other group meetings. Common types of group events in many project M&E systems include water users’ associations, micro-credit groups, micro-enterprises and village associations. In each project context, there will also be forums where implementing partners interact with each other, with project staff and with primary stakeholders, annual reviews and external missions (see 8.4).

Each of these regular events offers a chance for reflection on daily experiences. Sometimes special events may be needed. A particularly innovative type of group reflection is the “citizens’ jury” (see Box 8-16). This is a way to organise debate at a societal level on issues that are of paramount importance to primary stakeholders.

### Box 8-16. A citizens’ jury/scenario workshop on food futures for Andhra Pradesh, India

**Background.** The state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) in south India is currently rethinking its approach to farming, land use and marketing. The AP government’s vision of the future of the state’s food system is presented in its Vision 2020. There has been little or no involvement of small farmers and rural people in shaping this policy scenario. Discussions with local and state level partners have revealed considerable concerns over the possible impacts of Vision 2020 on livelihood security, agricultural biodiversity and local food systems and economies. The UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) facilitated a participatory process to encourage more public debate in policy choices on food futures for the state of Andhra Pradesh. The five-day “citizens’ jury” on food and farming futures involved citizens from all three regions of AP and key organisations.

**The citizens’ jury.** The jury was made up of representatives of small and marginal farmers from AP, small traders and food processors and consumers. To reflect the rural reality, jury members were mostly small and marginal farmers and also indigenous people. Over two thirds of the jury members were women. A panel of external observers oversaw the jury process. They checked the videos produced and observed the whole process. It was their role to ensure that each potential future food system scenario was presented in a fair and unprejudiced way and that the process was trustworthy and not captured by any interest group.

**Visions of the future.** Jury members were presented with three different scenarios. Each was advocated by key opinion-formers who tried to show the logic behind their scenario. It was up to the jury to decide which of the three scenarios is most likely to provide them with the best opportunities to enhance their livelihoods, food security and environment twenty years from now.

- **Vision 1 – Vision 2020.** This scenario was put forward by AP’s chief minister, with backing by the World Bank. It proposes to consolidate small farms and rapidly increase mechanisation and modernisation. Production-enhancing technologies such as genetic modification will be introduced in farming and food processing, reducing the number of people on the land from 70% to 40% by 2020.
- **Vision 2 – An export-based cash crop model of organic production.** This vision of the future is based on proposals within IFOAM and

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5 Adapted from http://www.poptel.org.uk/iied/iiedcitizenjuryAP1.html.
Organise heterogeneous groups appropriately. Primary stakeholders are not a homogeneous group. Group events need to consider this. The yearly participatory evaluation workshops of the Cuchumatanes project in Guatemala were originally run on the basis of production systems, with different workshops for farmers from different systems. However, it was found that the farmer groups who attended each workshop had different levels of development and so their degree of participation was unbalanced. As one project implementer described, “The more developed organisations finished the exercises first and then the rest were under pressure and did not go deep enough.” Because of this, later workshops were organised on the basis of a typology of organisation, based on financial capacity, productive potential and so on. This produced better results at the workshops.

Focus on understanding and deciding, rather than describing. Much discussion in groups tends to focus on people telling “what I did since we last met” in considerable detail, rather than discussing what worked well and why or why not. Working with questions like “What would you do differently next time and why?” or “What would you do the same and why?” helps the group focus discussions around understanding experiences in order to improve actions. In a Moroccan project one project team member has initiated self-evaluation with cooperatives. Examples of some of the questions asked during the self-review meetings include:

- What do you think you have been able to achieve in your work?
- What are the most important weaknesses that you find in the monitoring methods in the management of the cooperatives?
- What are your suggestions for improving your work?
- What are your training needs?
Create thematic learning groups. Another idea with positive outcomes is that of formal “learning groups” focusing around a theme or problem area. For example, national and local learning groups interact in Senegal to understand better how village-based resource management functions. The national learning group draws together key people from different hierarchical levels and sections within relevant bureaucracies and from external organisations. Local learning groups consist of representation from different groups within communities involved in participatory natural resource management in the case study areas. The groups enable shared analysis between people and organisations that might not otherwise exchange experiences, ideas and personal insights. Many projects undertake thematic evaluation or monitoring studies when specific issues arise. Learning groups could be assembled around these themes.

Make good use of the group by agreeing together how you will:

- Prepare for group meetings. What must each group member do and share beforehand to make the best use of the meeting time? What questions are guiding these preparations? Do all members have sufficient time, resources and guidance (e.g., clear questions) to make a meaningful contribution?
- Share information during group meetings. How do you use the limited time you have to do good analysis? What outputs do you expect from each meeting? How will you ensure that all members are able to share their thoughts?
- Write up notes about the meeting. Who will be responsible for documenting the meeting? What will be included? How will decisions be documented? How will you ensure that all the group members’ insights and information are represented in the document? How will the document be shared?
- Regularly assess the quality of meetings. Keep improving your effectiveness by evaluating the meetings. Box 8-17 suggests a list of possible criteria for evaluating the meeting. Develop your own criteria based on what you value in meetings.

**Box 8-17. Checklist of criteria for a reflective group event**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did we …?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ … hear the voice of everyone at the meeting in equal measure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ … not only share what we did but also what surprised us and what we might have learned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ … provoke each other to think by asking questions about the mistakes we made?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ … leave the meeting with clear consensus about what each one of us is going to do before we next meet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ … discuss not only what went well but also what did not go well and why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3.3 Using Steering Groups for Reflection

Most projects use steering committees of some sort to provide strategic guidance. In the Tanzania PIDP project, the project steering committee is the final decision-making and policy-making body. It is made up of the regional administrative secretariat, the permanent secretaries and funding agencies. It decides in which districts to work, gives final approval of the budget and approves the progress reports before distribution. Similarly, in PROCHALATE, El Salvador, the global and sectoral planning of the project and the general supervision of implementation is the responsibility of the national consultative committee. Different stakeholders sit on the committee: national organisations related to the project, representatives of imple-

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6 From the IIED research project “Institutionalising Participatory Approaches and Processes for Natural Resource Management”, see [http://www.iied.org/agri/ipa-hyderabadcontents.html](http://www.iied.org/agri/ipa-hyderabadcontents.html).
menting NGO partners, three representatives of primary stakeholders and the project director.

In other projects, the powers of such steering committees may be less extensive. For example, in ADIP, Bangladesh, the inter-ministerial project steering committee meeting is held only twice a year so does not have much direct engagement with project implementation.

Of primary importance in the establishment of the steering committee is clear extent – and limits – of responsibility. Once this is clear and agreed, and this can occur as part of project formulation, then the committee’s composition and frequency of meetings can be decided.

To use steering committees as learning opportunities, the ideas discussed in 8.3.1 are relevant. Use the meetings to assess dilemmas and problems and find solutions – rather than to report progress, as progress can be shared in documents beforehand. You might want to invite steering group members to visit the field at several moments during the project life and interact with field staff and primary stakeholders. This gives them a context, however brief, for the office-based discussions.

8.3.4. Learning from Your Annual Project Review

The overall purpose of an annual project review (APR) is to reach conclusions about achievements and failures in order to improve ongoing programme quality, and to share these conclusions. An APR is a critical learning opportunity. Yet not all projects include an APR in their M&E systems. An APR can also help to:

• ensure the overall project goals, results and implementation strategy remain appropriate;
• assess progress towards planned impacts;
• review implementation to date and analyse reasons for any deviations;
• review the operational and management effectiveness and efficiency of implementation;
• identify lessons and actions to improve next year’s implementation and performance.

An APR provides a vital input for the annual work plan and budget process. It allows the entire project team and other stakeholders to stop, take stock of what has been happening, look at the monitoring data, look at performance questions and make collective decisions about what each person/group can do to improve the project’s performance next year. The more stakeholders are involved in these reviews (see Box 8-18), the better the picture will be of what has been happening and the more people will have an understanding of what still needs to happen.

In Cuchumatanes (Guatemala), annual evaluations involved interest group representatives and communal banks to analyse the social, economic and production changes generated by project. Interest group representatives were selected using a simple chance model but came from all five project areas with more than one year of partnership with the project. Focus group discussions were held with interest groups and the banks separately to allow open discussions.

The annual process evaluation for KAEMP starts at the ward level. It is organised by the ward executive office, the head of administration at the ward level. The village government is aware of the different project groups active in the government and encourages these groups to send a representative to the evaluation. In addition, the village executive officer, the district project facilitator (DPF) and the extension staff at ward level are invited. Usually about 30 to 40 people attend.

At the meeting, a chairperson and secretary are elected by the participants. These two people will attend the related annual review at the district level where they will raise ward issues. The DPF facilitates a review of the action plan with questions such as:

- What happened compared to what was planned?
- What did not happen according to plans?
- Why did these activities not happen?
- What are the proposals for improving project implementation?

The group discusses these questions and responses are noted on flipchart paper to be documented later.

The annual project review is an important force for change as these examples show:

- At prior evaluations, participants complained that there was little involvement of the village in the project situational analysis and planning processes, resulting in the promotion of “packages” of agricultural technologies that are not understood by the farmers – they do not know why the packages came and how the interventions are decided. As a result of these evaluations (and pressure from IFAD), farmers are included in the planning cycle by involving them in a situational analysis based on participatory rural appraisal (PRA).
- The design for road rehabilitation was changed due to several issues raised by the villages. Since the villages wanted local people to benefit as much as possible from the rehabilitation process, they insisted on more local participation. As a result, the contractors must meet with the village leaders to discuss the design, to initiate the process of recruiting youth groups that will contribute labour (paid by the contractor) to the road rehabilitation, and to negotiate the labour rates.
- During the process of providing safe water through protecting natural springs, villagers realised that they no longer had places to wash their clothes. Before they would wash their clothes on the rocks next to the spring, but when the springs were protected, the rocks were no longer available. As a result, the project started to provide concrete slabs for washing clothes. This was not in the original project design.
- The mosquito nets that were initially distributed as part of the project’s health component were circular and small. This was not convenient as most people’s beds are rectangular and of varying sizes. The net design was changed to a larger, rectangular shape to accommodate variety in bed size and shape.

Step 1. Prepare well for the APR

1. Responsibility. Who is responsible for organising the review? Make sure that you, the project director, have agreed with the senior management team on who is responsible for organising the APR.

2. Timing. When will you schedule the workshop (time of day/how long), and which prior events (sensitising, mobilising, local-level analysis) are needed? Consider gender issues.

3. Agendas. Be clear about people’s expectations of the process and outputs.

4. Participants. Who will you invite and what will everyone’s role be? The more people who attend, the better you need to organise facilitation.

5. Location. Where will the event(s) be held? Is this appropriate for all those involved?

6. Data preparation. What do you want to do beforehand to prepare existing data for easier analysis and perhaps collecting additional data if necessary?

7. Facilitation. Who will facilitate and what facilitation methods will be used?
Step 2. During the review

1. Organise group discussions around three key areas:
   - Review overall progress towards the intended project outcomes (results) and impacts. Having a large copy of the existing logframe matrix on the workshop wall will help when referring to intended outcomes and impacts. Also include reflections on unintended effects and impacts.
   - Review specific work carried out over the previous year and identify constraints and lessons learned.
   - Review, and if necessary improve, the overall project objective hierarchy and strategy.

2. Keep it participatory and keep people engaged through good facilitation and creating the right workshop conditions (see Box 8-19).

3. Ensure decisions for improved action are agreed upon before the end of the workshop.

Box 8-19. Enabling meaningful participation of primary stakeholders

To make it possible for primary stakeholders to take part in a reflective event, such as an APR, think about the following questions:

- Timing. When do primary stakeholders have free time for the meetings/activities you would like to have with them?
- Location. Where do they feel comfortable about meeting? Where are they allowed to meet?
- Team members. Are the team members trained in and sensitive to finding ways of involving marginalised groups and individuals?
- Topics. Is everyone raising his or her own issues? If certain groups dominate, are other people’s opinions explicitly asked? If people speak on behalf of others, what are the facilitators doing to check the validity of what is being said?
- Assessing input. Do marginalised groups/individuals feel able to have an equal voice? Is the facilitator’s help needed to ensure this? Can separate meetings be more effective? What else is needed to make sure that the ideas and information from all sides are given equal weight?

Step 3. After the review

1. Make sure that any documentation from the review is action-oriented, identifying who is responsible for what and by when.

2. Ask key stakeholders to verify the report and recommend changes before circulation.

3. Share the workshop report with key individuals and organisations.

4. Complete and check the work plan.

5. Make a detailed budget (see 7.6).

6. Produce the AWPB document (see 3.5).

Boxes 8-20 and 8-21 show two examples of annual reviews that might inspire you. The Tanzania example shows that annual reviews can be appropriate not just for the overall project, but for any level that involves various stakeholders and consensus about next steps needed. The El Salvador example highlights the importance of building an annual review process that encourages constructive criticism to strengthen and empower local organisations.
Box 8-20. Annual reviews – the Tanzania way

The district annual review meetings of PIDP in Tanzania are attended by:

- district programme manager;
- district PMC – district executive director, councillors, village reps, heads of departments (component managers);
- community development officer;
- programme and training officer;
- irrigation technician;
- cooperative, association, and savings and credit representatives;
- rice specialist/other subject-matter specialists.

The project has considerable decision-making power at the district level, including cross-allocating funds. Reflecting the more decentralised nature of the country’s governance system, the PIDP has devolved decision-making to the district level.

Box 8-21. Innovating with annual evaluations by implementing partners of PROCHALATE, El Salvador

One of the implementing partners uses an interesting participatory evaluation approach that focuses on encouraging an attitude and culture of self-evaluation and organisational empowerment. The approach has four phases: self-evaluation, cross-evaluation (at the field level and in plenary with the two teams together), plenary and final balance.

1. During the self-evaluation, each team evaluates its work plan at mid-year and at the end of the year, looking at: the proposed objectives; the objectives achieved and not-achieved, plus reasons; and what to do for improving action.

2. The cross-evaluation consists of a field team facilitating a participatory evaluation of another team’s work. They conduct workshops with primary stakeholders of the other team to assess the quality of the work. The evaluation does not focus on the technicians but on the implementing partner. This encourages the neutrality and freedom of primary stakeholders to express their opinions while avoiding any intimidation possibly created by the presence of the participating technician. This generates professional ethics and encourages a self-critical and positive attitude.

The fieldwork aims to identify advances and difficulties and to propose solutions. The fieldwork involves sampled visits to primary stakeholders’ farms to observe technical aspects (analysis of the recommendations given, state of the crops, etc.) as well as an evaluation workshop using questions like: a) What are the main advances of the partner’s work? Why? b) How did life at the family and community levels improve thanks to their actions? c) In which of the implemented activities did women participate? How? d) What are the main deficiencies of the work? Why? e) Is there a proposal to overcome deficiencies? f) What is your opinion about working together with the implementing partner? Why? g) What part of the work can you do alone? Why? h) Who is the fieldworker from the partner organisation that assists you? How does he/she do that? This table is used to assess fieldworkers’ performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Technician</th>
<th>Virtues/ Qualities</th>
<th>Deficiencies</th>
<th>Changes Suggested</th>
<th>Qualification (up to 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In the plenary, each team presents its own evaluation and the evaluation made by the other team. Then, a final balance is made comparing the results of the self-evaluation workshop with the results found by the other team. With this system it is possible to avoid preconceptions and vested opinions while reinforcing the idea of evaluation for improving instead of for judging.
8.4 The Contribution of External Reviews and Evaluations to Critical Reflection

Besides internal self-evaluation and learning events, all projects also deal with external reviews and evaluations. These events can be very valuable moments for project stakeholders to focus on key issues and strategic changes. Outside perspectives and experience can help by raising questions about what is taken for granted and bringing out issues that might be sensitive yet critical. Those involved in project implementation can benefit from making these events reflective. This section focuses on how a project team can make external missions interesting learning opportunities but does not provide details for the external reviewers on how to undertake such missions.

Most projects deal with the following types of external events:
- supervision missions – annual, sometimes with one follow-up visit after six months;
- mid-term reviews and/or evaluations – halfway through a project’s lifetime;
- interim evaluations – prior to completion to draw out key lessons and prepare a possible second phase;
- completion evaluations – after project closure.

8.4.1 Getting the Most Out of Supervision Missions

Typically, a supervision mission will visit the project once a year, with another short, half yearly follow-up. A supervision mission can last from one to two weeks, with a team of three to five people. Supervision missions aim to provide regular external guidance on operations, progress made and technical problems (see Box 8-22), in order to support timely corrective actions. As these missions have a formal status, they can be useful moments for agreeing on changes in project directions.

Box 8-22. Basic tasks for supervision mission teams

- Organise the project start-up workshop/mission.
- Determine the supervision plan.
- Examine regularly the relevance of project activities and suggest modifications.
- Review and approve, with IFAD, the annual work plan and budget (AWPB).
- Check that procurement procedures are in line with provisions of loan agreement and recommend corrective action.
- Review implementation status of approved AWPB and its preparation for next year.
- Review primary stakeholder participation in M&E activities and check that stakeholders’ inputs are part of project work plans.
- Identify and facilitate problem solving plus adoption of recommendations from earlier missions.
- Monitor and secure government compliance with project covenants and make recommendations to IFAD and the government in case of non-compliance.
- Ensure that the project submits financing statements and audit reports as per loan agreement, and provide timely comments on the audit reports.
- Monitor compliance of the special account and statements of expenditure with loan agreement conditions, plus periodic replenishment of the special account at the required pace.
- Monitor and secure compliance of counterpart funding.
- Assist borrower in preparing project completion reports.

Supervision missions vary considerably in nature and quality. Many projects experience them as policing exercises rather than collegiate support. It may be worth discussing with the responsible cooperating institution and IFAD how to modify mission styles to make them more collaborative along the lines of the example in Box 8-23.
Box 8-23. Making supervision missions more collaborative

As the cooperating institution for the IFAD-supported RTIP programme in Ghana, the World Bank manager has significantly changed the tone and method of supervision missions. First, she has changed the name from “supervision mission” to “project implementation support mission”. Also, these missions include several local government counterparts, project staff and some external resource persons. The entire expanded team is responsible for developing and distributing the aide-mémoire. This has greatly reduced the fear associated with supervision missions and stimulated a sense of shared ownership of the findings. Decisions made and actions agreed upon are more acceptable to those involved. These changes now enable easier discussion on insights on project implementation and progress, and so support joint decision making. The project team can use these missions to make changes in the loan agreement that it would not be able to make on its own.

Significantly for those concerned with M&E, supervision missions rarely pay sufficient attention to M&E from a learning perspective. If they do consider M&E, they tend to focus on the data collection side rather than how information is used and participatory M&E processes. To improve supervision missions and make them part of the overall project learning process, consider undertaking these steps:

• Seek project input into developing the terms of reference (TOR) for the supervision mission to ensure it is appropriate to project needs at that point in time.

• Ask project staff, staff of implementing partners and primary stakeholder representatives which key issues they would like the mission to address and inform the supervision team of these beforehand.

• Request the cooperating institution to include people with M&E experience in the supervision team.

• Ask the supervision mission to focus on M&E issues and help with overcoming any limitations in the M&E system.

• Ensure that representatives of key project stakeholders have an opportunity to comment on and discuss any recommendations raised by the supervision mission. This can be organised to happen in a feedback meeting prior to the team’s departure, in which draft findings are presented and local stakeholders have a chance to react.

• In the M&E plan, include tasks that relate to preparing and responding to the supervision mission, so it is clear who is responsible for this and when it should occur.

• Match topics with appropriate methods. Not all project components are equally easy to cover within the time frame of a supervision mission. For example, checking the quality of engineering works can be fairly straightforward. By comparison, assessing how primary stakeholders perceive the degree to which decision making in the project is democratic will require more sensitive and prolonged discussions with local stakeholders. To accommodate these different aspects of a project, work with the supervision team to design appropriate methods for the different components.

• To ensure that a supervision mission focuses on learning to improve action, minimise time spent on lengthy presentations of facts that can be documented beforehand. Devote available time to discussing problems, emerging issues, options for action and lessons learned.
8.4.2 Preparing for, Managing and Responding to External Reviews and Evaluations

When external reviews or evaluations work well, project stakeholders will feel that the external reviewers have:

- provided independent and constructive criticism that helps them reflect on and identify lessons learned that can improve action;
- given a fair judgement of project progress and areas that need improvement;
- helped identify priorities for the remaining time of the project to support the rational use of resources (both human and material);
- helped unite diverse stakeholder perspectives.

However, problems can occur. Being aware of the key problems (see Box 8-24) can improve the reviews and evaluations. Project managers can work with implementing partners to prepare, manage and respond well to the review.

Box 8-24. Common limitations of external reviews and evaluations

- External reviewers, due to time constraints, often have limited dialogue with project stakeholders, outside the staff.
- Reviewers can jump to conclusions without in-depth knowledge of local realities.
- Reviewers usually have insufficient time and so tend to make superficial analyses or to generalise the situation.
- If foreign reviewers are involved, language constraints and limited cultural insights may affect their analysis.
- Reviewers can be excessively strict in their methods.
- Reviewers can be inclined to focus more on funding agency requirements than what a project needs for improved impact.
- Reports often highlight the negative aspects of the project and do not give due emphasis to positive aspects.

Prepare well for an external review

1. Discuss with implementing partner staff and primary stakeholder representatives how they would like to see the external review take place. Ask how much time they can contribute and when it would suit them to meet with the external review team.

2. Prepare the TOR with the funding agency and review team, as appropriate. Stipulate important aspects such as: the methodology to be used by the external team, how the feedback and response process with project stakeholders will be, the types of information the team will need from different stakeholders and who will be involved (see Box 8-25). See Annex E for more details.

3. Be clear about what the external team expects the project stakeholders to prepare in terms of information and field visits.

4. Gather all relevant information about the project, as agreed.

5. Once the TOR are defined, inform all stakeholders - on time - about the review dates and methodology. Define what this means for them in terms of expected input and potential implications. Ensure that the proposed timetable matches up with the schedules of key stakeholders.

Box 8-25. Engaging M&E staff in external reviews - experience from Yemen

The knowledge and experience of M&E staff is critical for external reviews, so review teams need to work closely with M&E staff. In the TEPP project, M&E staff had provided useful information. Yet they had not been adequately recognised or supported by the external review. This ended up impacting negatively on the capacity to provide information needed for future reviews.
Manage the visit

Once the external mission has arrived, senior management will need to coordinate the visit so it involves stakeholders fairly and appropriately.

1. Plan for several field visits to give the opportunity to the team to see what is happening on the ground. This is also a good opportunity for reflective discussions with project stakeholders on what is proceeding well and what could be improved.

2. Project management will need to make all logistic arrangements.

3. Promote dialogue between project stakeholders and the external reviewers as much as possible, by setting up a programme that includes meetings with a range of diverse stakeholders. Seek to include people who you know will have divergent views on the project.

4. Ask that the reviewers present draft findings to project staff, staff of implementing partners and primary stakeholder representatives. This will allow for factual corrections and clarifications to be included in a final report.

Respond constructively to the review/evaluation report

The findings of the mission represent opportunities for project implementers to take corrective actions. Not dealing well with the report may mean losing out on an important learning opportunity.

1. The project director should make sure key implementers have a copy of the draft report and that a discussion is organised as soon as possible after the draft is ready to be able to correct mistakes before the report is formalised.

2. Project managers (staff and partners) plus other implementing partner staff should carefully analyse the report content and the recommendations of the review mission to assess relevance, feasibility and validity.

3. The project director should communicate questions and concerns from stakeholders within a couple of weeks of the draft report being ready.

8.4.3 Assessing Impacts at Project Completion

The completion point of a project reflects an understanding among core project stakeholders about the lessons learned and recommendations from the final evaluation, and it expresses an intention to use these not only in the future implementation of this project, but also in designing new projects. Project completion reports do not need to be overly elaborate. For example, four completion reports undertaken in the Asia region looked at only four questions:

- What did we learn about knowledge management in the project (which technical/institutional innovations occurred)?
- What was the impact of the project as perceived by the primary stakeholders?
- Did the project generate any output/success that has the potential for policy implications and impacts?
- What did the project achieve in building partnerships with others?

These questions can be answered in elaborate ways but also have simpler alternatives.
Impacts will always need to be considered at project evaluation. Many aspects of assessing impacts have been discussed in other sections of this Guide (see Sections 2, 5, 6, 7 and Annex D). Consider the following as you prepare for project completion.

Prepare well ahead of time if the learning process is to include other stakeholders. Particularly in the case of participatory impact assessments that form the basis of project completion, start preparations well in advance. If you wish to involve primary stakeholders in designing the impact study and implementing it, then this will require considerable time to organise perhaps some training events and pre-testing evaluation questions and data-collection methods.

Seek insights via open-ended questions. At project completion, you are expected to show what the impact of the project has been at the level of outcomes and purpose. Many projects try to show impact by using the indicators as set out in the M&E plan (see Sections 4 and 5 and Annex C). However, also seek to include more open-ended questions as this might reveal more accurately what has actually changed in local lives from the perspective of the primary stakeholders. Asking primary stakeholders how their lives are now and what can be attributed to project efforts will allow a broader understanding than by only looking at indicators related to the objective hierarchy.

Avoid overly-ambitious impact assessments. Many completion evaluations are overly-ambitious in terms of what they intend to assess and explain. Some impacts may only emerge well after project completion. So keep focused on the types of changes that are likely to be tangible.

Devote time for cross-cutting issues. Cross-cutting issues, such as impact on gender relations, benefits for the poorest groups and contribution to shared decision-making, may lose out if they are not included explicitly in the evaluation questions. Box 8-26 lists the types of information you might seek to understand gender impact.

Box 8-26. Including gender issues in reviews and evaluations

Include gender as a theme in the terms of reference. A gender expert, or a person knowledgeable about gender issues, should be part of all review/evaluation teams. Include women and men in the team. Present findings in a gender-disaggregated manner in the report. The following themes with some possible questions can be assessed.

- **Planning, implementation and participation:** How were women’s perspectives taken into account during project design? What type of gender strategies were adopted by the project – and how? Were specific groups of women identified as target groups?
- **Relevance:** How did the project respond to the identified specific interests and needs of women related to the project – and to those of men?
- **Effectiveness and efficiency:** How and what extent were gender-specific objectives achieved? How did women/men participate in project activities (including training projects, seminars and meetings)? How did the project support this? How did women and men participate in project-related decision making?
- **Impact:** What is the impact of the project on women – and on men? How have women benefited – and men? Are impacts sustainable for them? How has the project contributed to capacity-building of women – and of men? Have project activities contributed to enhancing women’s status and access to resources – and men’s?
- **Recommendations and lessons learned:** How has the project contributed to enhancing gender equality? Make recommendations on: (a) how to strengthen a gender perspective in the project; (b) how to promote more equal participation of women and men; and (c) how to monitor and measure gender-related progress.

Do not delay “lessons learned” exercises too much. Undertake any lesson-learning work as promptly as possible at project completion to ensure the findings are relevant and up-to-date. If writing up lessons is left too long, then the information may become outdated and worthless. Furthermore, memories fade quickly, which may pose problems particularly when wanting to understand what is attributable to project efforts.

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7 Adapted from: [http://www.unesco.org/ios/eng/evaluation/tools/outil_08e.html](http://www.unesco.org/ios/eng/evaluation/tools/outil_08e.html).
Document project completion reports including lessons learned. Table 8-1 offers an idea of what to include in the project completion report. Rather than describing what happened during the project, focus instead on distilling impacts and lessons learned.

Table 8-1. Indicative table of contents for a project completion report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Project background: country, area and clients, objectives, components and strategy, expected outputs, plus the process followed for the completion evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Project performance           | • Contextual conditions  
• Component performance  
• Targeting of primary stakeholders  
• Training and capacity-building  
• Project management and coordination  
• Monitoring and evaluation  
• Relationship with the cooperating institution, IFAD, the borrower; and how this affected performance |
| Analysis and impact           | Achievement of objectives: social and economic, institutional, per component, as perceived by primary stakeholders |
| Sustainability of the project | Factors that favour or hinder possible sustained impact of the project |
| Lessons learned               | Possible themes for lessons learned (to be determined separately for each completion evaluation): enabling environment, capacity-building and training, targeting of the poorest, lessons per project component, financial operations, M&E and learning processes, relationships with implementing partners |
| Conclusions                   | Conclusions and recommendations (for a possible phase two or other projects) |
| Appendices                    | Results of participatory impact assessment or other studies undertaken  
Financial report  
TOR of completion evaluation team |
Further Reading


List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
This Annex is useful for:

- managers, M&E staff, consultants and
- IFAD and cooperating institution staff

...to ensure there is common understanding of key M&E concepts.

This Annex contains a list of terms and their definitions, as used within IFAD-supported projects and in this Guide.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition used in this Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Obligation of government, public services or funding agencies to demonstrate to citizens that contracted work has been conducted in compliance with agreed rules and standards or to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and/or plans. This may require a careful, even legally defensible, demonstration that the work is consistent with the contract terms. Projects commonly focus on upward accountability to the funding agency, while downward accountability involves making accounts and plans transparent to the primary stakeholders. Ensuring accountability is one part of the function of monitoring and evaluation (learning and management are the other two).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Actions taken or work performed in a project to produce specific outputs by using inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive management</td>
<td>A process that integrates project design, management and monitoring to provide a framework for testing assumptions, adaptation and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>See “Review”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual work plan and budget (AWPB)</td>
<td>The annual commitment of the project towards the communities, the Government and IFAD, and of which implementation progress will be measured. It details the operational aspects of a project, based on the strategic plan and the situation on the ground. It is the basis for the detailed scheduling of activities and specific assignments in monthly management meetings. It is also the foundation for monitoring progress at the activity level and regarding resource use/allocation. Importantly, in the more demand-driven projects, the AWPB is also the formal (and legal) expression of the consolidated set of projects and initiatives of the primary stakeholders that will be supported over the coming year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>Assessment, in accordance with established decision criteria, of the feasibility and acceptability of a project or programme prior to a funding commitment. Criteria commonly include relevance and sustainability. An appraisal may also relate to the examination of opinions as part of the process for selecting which project to fund.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal report</td>
<td>The document that results from the appraisal mission and serves as the basis for project operational planning and annual planning. It is the overall framework (but not a blueprint) for the project strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>A specific and chosen way of advancing or proceeding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>A process (which may or may not be systematic) of gathering information, analysing it, then making a judgement on the basis of the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>External factors (i.e. events, conditions or decisions) that could affect the progress or success of a project or programme. They are necessary to achieve the project objectives, but are largely or completely beyond the control of the project management. They are worded as positive conditions. Initial assumptions are those conditions perceived to be essential for the success of a project or programme. Critical (or “killer”) assumptions are those conditions perceived to threaten the implementation of a project or programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>The causal link of one thing to another; e.g. the extent to which observed (or expected to be observed) changes can be linked to a specific intervention in view of the effects of other interventions or confounding factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audit</strong></td>
<td>Verification of the legality and regularity of the implementation of resources, carried out by independent auditors. An audit determines whether, and to what extent, the activities and organisational procedures conform to norms and criteria set out in advance. An audit helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and government processes. In an internal audit the auditors report to the organisation being audited, while in an external audit the auditors report to either those who own the organisation (for example the board) or fund it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline information</strong></td>
<td>Information – usually consisting of facts and figures collected at the initial stages of a project – that provides a basis for measuring progress in achieving project objectives and outputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline survey/study</strong></td>
<td>An analysis describing the situation in a project area – including data on individual primary stakeholders – prior to a development intervention. Progress (results and accomplishments) can be assessed and comparisons made against it. It also serves as an important reference for the completion evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benchmark</strong></td>
<td>Reference point or standard against which performance or achievements can be compared. A benchmark might refer to what has been achieved in the past, by other comparable organisations, or what could reasonably have been achieved under the circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td>The individuals, groups or organisations who, in their own view and whether targeted or not, benefit directly or indirectly from the development intervention. In this guide, they are referred to as the primary stakeholders of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget plan schedule</strong></td>
<td>Plan assigning the quarterly cost to be incurred by the different activities as well as subdividing these costs on the basis of the source of finance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget plan summary</strong></td>
<td>Summary of the budget information according to output, project component, district and facilitation units, and national and overall project level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity</strong></td>
<td>The ability of individuals and organisations to perform functions effectively, efficiently and in a sustainable manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity-building</strong></td>
<td>The processes through which capacity is created. This is an increasingly key crosscutting issue in poverty alleviation projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causal relationship</strong></td>
<td>A logical connection or cause-and-effect linkage existing in the achievement of related, interdependent results. Generally the term refers to plausible linkages, not statistically accurate relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causality analysis</strong></td>
<td>The study of cause-and-effect relations that link an intervention to its impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>A group of people living in the same locality and sharing some common characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community participation</strong></td>
<td>Generally considered to be the active participation of community members in local development activities. In practice, however, the term refers to a wide range of degrees of local involvement in external development interventions, from token and passive involvement to more empowerment-oriented forms of local decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion</strong></td>
<td>The final phase in the project cycle, when a project completion report is produced. “Lessons learned” are identified and the various project completion activities take place. It can include an end-of-project evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion evaluation</strong></td>
<td>An external evaluation that occurs after project completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion report</td>
<td>See “Project completion report”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual model</td>
<td>A diagram of a set of relationships between factors that are believed to impact or lead to a target condition. It is the foundation of project design, management and monitoring, and it is the first part of a complete project plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>A specially selected subgroup of people who purposefully do not receive the same treatment, input or training, etc. as the target group. Thus, differences between the control group and the target group can be measured and evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating institution</td>
<td>The organisation that, in a loan agreement, is responsible for the loan administration and the project supervision on behalf of IFAD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-benefit analysis</td>
<td>The comparison of investment and operating costs with the direct benefits or impact generated by the investment in a given intervention. It uses a variety of methods and means of expressing results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost effectiveness</td>
<td>Comparison of the relative costs of achieving a given result or output by different means (employed where benefits are difficult to determine).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country programme evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation of one or more donors’ or agencies’ portfolio of development interventions in a partner country and the assistance strategy behind the interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country/COSOP strategy</td>
<td>A framework of objectives and priorities for a country drawn up and used to steer investments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical assumption</td>
<td>An important factor, outside of aid itself, that influences the success of the activity, but over which the manager has no influence. Initial assumptions constitute perceived conditions for the success of a project. See “Assumptions”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>Questioning and analysing experiences, observations, theories, beliefs and/or assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downward accountability</td>
<td>The process by which development organisations are accountable to their partners and poor and marginalised groups. It entails greater participation and transparency in organisations’ work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Intended or unintended change resulting directly or indirectly from a development intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>A measure of the extent to which a project attains its objectives at the goal or purpose level; i.e. the extent to which a development intervention has attained, or is expected to attain, its relevant objectives efficiently and in a sustainable way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>The extent to which the project’s objectives were achieved or expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>A measure of how economically inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted into outputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluability</td>
<td>The extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>A systematic (and as objective as possible) examination of a planned, ongoing or completed project. It aims to answer specific management questions and to judge the overall value of an endeavour and supply lessons learned to improve future actions, planning and decision-making. Evaluations commonly seek to determine the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and the relevance of the project or organisation’s objectives. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, offering concrete lessons learned to help partners and funding agencies make decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation of a project carried out by IFAD’s Office of Evaluation and Studies and implementing partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitator</strong></td>
<td>A person who helps members of a group conduct a meeting in an efficient and effective way but who does not dictate what will happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td>The transmission of evaluation findings to parties for whom it is relevant and useful so as to facilitate learning. This may involve the collection and dissemination of findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from experience. Specifically in the context of evaluation, to return and share the evaluation results with those who participated in the evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation conducted during implementation to improve performance. It is intended for managers and direct supporters of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>The higher-order programme or sector objective to which a development intervention, such as a project, is intended to contribute. Thus it is a statement of intent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grassroots organisations</strong></td>
<td>The organisations based in communities that (may) represent the primary stakeholders vis-à-vis the project and can be implementing partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal logic</strong></td>
<td>A summary of the project approach whose objective in a logframe is to define how objectives specified in the project description will be measured and the means by which the measurement will be verified. In this Guide, it is a summary of the M&amp;E matrix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>The changes in the lives of rural people, as perceived by them and their partners at the time of evaluation, plus sustainability-enhancing change in their environment to which the project has contributed. Changes can be positive or negative, intended or unintended. In the logframe terminology these “perceived changes in the lives of the people” may correspond either to the purpose level or to the goal level of a project intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact assessment</strong></td>
<td>The process of assessing the impact of a programme in an intervention area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementing partners</strong></td>
<td>Those organisations either sub-contracted by the Project Management Unit or those organisations officially identified in the loan agreement as responsible for implementing a defined aspect of the project. Also known as “co-implementing partners”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent evaluation</strong></td>
<td>See “External evaluation”. An evaluation carried out by entities and persons free of control by those responsible for the design and implementation of the development intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
<td>Quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable basis for assessing achievement, change or performance. A unit of information measured over time that can help show changes in a specific condition. A given goal or objective can have multiple indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect effects</strong></td>
<td>The unplanned changes brought about as a result of the intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information management system</strong></td>
<td>A system of inputting, collating and organising data that should provide selective data and reports to the management, to assist in monitoring and controlling the project organisation, resources, activities and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input</strong></td>
<td>The financial, human and material resources necessary to produce the intended outputs of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention logic</strong></td>
<td>See “Objective hierarchy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interim evaluation</strong></td>
<td>A project evaluation undertaken by IFAD’s Office of Evaluation and Studies toward the end of the project implementation period (about one year before the loan closing date) when IFAD is considering a request to finance a second phase or a new project in the same area. An interim evaluation is a key opportunity for IFAD, the government, implementing partners and primary stakeholders to learn together from experience before embarking on the design of a follow-up project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint evaluation</td>
<td>An evaluation to which different institutions and/or partners contribute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Reflecting on experience to identify how a situation or future actions could be improved and then using this knowledge to make actual improvements. This can be individual or group-based. Learning involves applying lessons learned to future actions, which provides the basis for another cycle of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
<td>Knowledge generated by reflecting on experience that has the potential to improve future actions. A lesson learned summarises knowledge at a point in time, while learning is an ongoing process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan agreement</td>
<td>An agreement spelling out the project's goal, area, main components and budget by expenditure category. It contains formal conditions that must be complied with, primarily relating to procurement, reporting and financial management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical framework approach (LFA)</td>
<td>An analytical, presentational and management tool that involves problem analysis, stakeholder analysis, developing a hierarchy of objectives and selecting a preferred implementation strategy. It helps to identify strategic elements (inputs, outputs, purpose, goal) and their causal relationships, as well as the external assumptions (risks) that may influence success and failure. It thus facilitates planning, execution and evaluation of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical framework matrix</td>
<td>Also known as “logframe” or “logframe matrix”. A table, usually consisting of four rows and four columns, that summarises what the project intends to do and how (necessary inputs, outputs, purpose, objectives), what the key assumptions are, and how outputs and outcomes will be monitored and evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing for impact model</td>
<td>The process of guiding the overall project strategy, creating a learning environment, and ensuring effective project operations by developing and using an effective M&amp;E system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management information system</td>
<td>See “Information management system”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means of verification</td>
<td>The expected source(s) of information that can help answer the performance question or indicators. This is found in the third column of the standard logframe. It is detailed further in the M&amp;E matrix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term evaluation</td>
<td>An external evaluation performed towards the middle of the period of implementation of the project, whose principal goal is to draw conclusions for reorienting the project strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term review (MTR)</td>
<td>An elaborate version of a supervision mission, with the same actors, that sometimes questions the design of the project. There is no standardised format and so can range from a supervision mission to a full-scale mid-term evaluation-like exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>The regular collection and analysis of information to assist timely decision-making, ensure accountability and provide the basis for evaluation and learning. It is a continuing function that uses methodical collection of data to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing project or programme with early indications of progress and achievement of objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E)</td>
<td>The combination of monitoring and evaluation which together provide the knowledge required for: a) effective project management and b) reporting and accountability responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E framework</td>
<td>An overview of the M&amp;E system developed during the design phase of a project and included in the project appraisal report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E matrix</td>
<td>A table describing the performance questions, information gathering requirements (including indicators), reflection and review events with stakeholders, and resources and activities required to implement a functional M&amp;E system. This matrix lists how data will be collected, when, by whom and where.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E (learning) plan</td>
<td>An overall framework of performance and learning questions, information gathering requirements (including indicators), reflection and review events with stakeholders, and resources and activities required to implement a functional M&amp;E system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E (learning) system</td>
<td>The set of planning, information gathering and synthesis, and reflection and reporting processes, along with the necessary supporting conditions and capacities required for the M&amp;E outputs to make a valuable contribution to project decision-making and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E unit</td>
<td>The generic title used for units at both the project and sectoral levels responsible for M&amp;E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative summary</td>
<td>The first column of the logframe matrix in which the inputs, outputs, purpose and goal are formulated. See “Objective Hierarchy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>A specific statement detailing the desired accomplishments or outcomes of a project at different levels (short to long term). A good objective meets the criteria of being impact oriented, measurable, time limited, specific and practical. Objectives can be arranged in a hierarchy of two or more levels (see “Objective hierarchy”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective hierarchy</td>
<td>The different levels of objectives, from activities up to goal, as specified in the first column of the logframe. If the project is designed well, realisation of each level of objectives in the hierarchy should lead to fulfilment of the project goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectively verifiable indicators</td>
<td>A group of criteria (not necessarily measurable) used to verify the degree of accomplishment (foreseen or actual) of the sectoral purpose, the objective, and the inputs and outputs of a project. They can be quantitative, and therefore both verifiable and measurable, or qualitative, and therefore only verifiable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational plan</td>
<td>See “Annual work plan and budget”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>The results achieved at the level of “purpose” in the objective hierarchy. In IFAD’s terminology, outcome is part of impact (result at purpose and goal level).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>The tangible (easily measurable, practical), immediate and intended results to be produced through sound management of the agreed inputs. Examples of outputs include goods, services or infrastructure produced by a project and meant to help realise its purpose. These may also include changes, resulting from the intervention, that are needed to achieve the outcomes at the purpose level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output indicators</td>
<td>Indicator at the output level of the objective hierarchy, usually the quantity and quality of outputs and the timing of their delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>One or more processes in which an individual (or group) takes part in specific decision-making and action, and over which s/he may exercise specific controls. It is often used to refer specifically to processes in which primary stakeholders take an active part in planning and decision-making, implementation, learning and evaluation. This often has the intention of sharing control over the resources generated and responsibility for their future use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory evaluation</td>
<td>A broad term for the involvement of primary and other stakeholders in evaluation. The primary focus may be the information needs of stakeholders rather than the donor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory impact monitoring</td>
<td>A continual immediate assessment of the impact, used to control and steer purposes. It is characterised by the way actors at various levels attempt to collaborate in order to reflect on the impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>The organisation in the project country with which the funding agency collaborates to achieve mutually agreed upon objectives. Partners may include host country governments, local and international NGOs, universities, professional and business associations, private businesses, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>The degree to which a development intervention or a development partner operates according to specific criteria/standards/guidelines or achieves results in accordance with stated goals or plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance question</td>
<td>A question that helps guide the information seeking and analysis process, to help understand whether the project is performing as planned or, if not, why not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning system</td>
<td>A system including the following main aspects: strategic planning, annual planning and budgeting, and monthly activity scheduling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precondition</td>
<td>Condition that must be fulfilled before a project can become effective (when disbursement against the loan becomes possible).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary stakeholders</td>
<td>The main intended beneficiaries of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process evaluation</td>
<td>An evaluation aimed at describing and understanding the internal dynamics and relationships of a project, programme or institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process monitoring</td>
<td>The activities of consciously selecting processes, selectively and systematically observing them to compare them with others, and communicating about what has been observed to learn how to steer and shape the processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>An intervention that consists of a set of planned, interrelated activities designed to achieve defined objectives within a given budget and a specified period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project completion report</td>
<td>The report that describes the situation at the end of a development intervention, including lessons learned. The project completion report (PCR) is the responsibility of the borrower (i.e. the government).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project cycle management</td>
<td>A tool for understanding the tasks and management functions to be performed in the course of a project or programme's lifetime. This commonly includes the stages of identification, preparation, appraisal, implementation/supervision, evaluation, completion and lesson learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation of an individually planned development intervention designed to achieve specific objectives within a given budget and time period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project impacts</td>
<td>The changes in a situation that arise from the combined effects of project activities, or the extent to which the goal or highest-level project objectives are achieved. Impact also refers to any unintended positive or negative changes that result from a project. Impact sometimes means anything achieved by the project beyond direct outputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project implementation manual</td>
<td>A project-specific document that sets out the project strategy, operational activities, steps and procedures, and responsibilities of key stakeholders. This often includes a detailed M&amp;E operational plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>The process of leading, planning, organising, staffing and controlling activities, people and other resources in order to achieve particular objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project performance</td>
<td>The overall quality of a project in terms of its impact, value to beneficiaries, implementation effectiveness, and efficiency and sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project strategy</td>
<td>An overall framework of what a project will achieve and how it will be implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proxy indicator</td>
<td>An appropriate indicator that is used to represent a less easily measurable one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The positive improved situation that a project or programme is accountable for achieving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td>Something that is not summarised in numerical form, such as minutes from community meetings and general notes from observations. Qualitative data normally describe people's knowledge, attitudes or behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Something measured or measurable by, or concerned with, quantity and expressed in numbers or quantities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reach</strong></td>
<td>The beneficiaries and other stakeholders of a development intervention, whether sectors, groups of people or geographic areas of the country or region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which the objectives of a project are consistent with the target group’s priorities and the recipient and donors' policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Consistency or dependability of data and evaluation judgements, with reference to the quality of the instruments, procedures and analyses used to collect and interpret evaluation data. Information is reliable when repeated observations using the same instrument under identical conditions produce similar results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
<td>Items that a project has or needs in order to operate, such as staff time, managerial time, local knowledge, money, equipment, trained personnel and socio-political opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Result</strong></td>
<td>The measurable output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive or negative) of a development intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review</strong></td>
<td>An assessment of the performance of a project or programme, periodically or on an as-needed basis. A review is more extensive than monitoring, but less so than evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk</strong></td>
<td>Possible negative external factors, i.e. events, conditions or decisions, which are expected to seriously delay or prevent the achievement of the project objectives and outputs (and which are normally largely or completely beyond the control of the project management).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample</strong></td>
<td>The selection of a representative part of a population in order to determine parameters or characteristics of the whole population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-evaluation</strong></td>
<td>An evaluation by those who are administering or participating in a programme or project in the field and/or by those who are entrusted with the design and delivery of (part of) a development intervention. As with any evaluation, a self-evaluation focuses on overall impact and performance, or specific aspects thereof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation analysis</strong></td>
<td>The process of understanding the status, condition, trends and key issues affecting people, ecosystems and institutions in a given geographic context at any level (local, national, regional, international).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>An agency, organisation, group or individual who has a direct or indirect interest in the project/programme, or who affects or is affected positively or negatively by the implementation and outcome of it. In this Guide, primary stakeholders is the term used for the main intended beneficiaries of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder participation</strong></td>
<td>Active involvement by stakeholders in the design, management and monitoring of the project. Full participation means all representatives of key stakeholder groups at the project site become involved in mutually agreed, appropriate ways.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Strategic planning
A broad description of the activities that would normally be carried out as part of project development, from start to finish, and the milestones that would generally be achieved along the way, such as implementation agreements, registration, etc. The plan should also explain the different aspects that need to be addressed as part of project development, and illustrate basic principles that are to be followed. The sequence of and relationship between main activities and milestones should also be described. The appraisal report should be used as a starting point for refinement of the strategic plan as well as detailed operational planning.

### Supervision
A process in which the legally responsible organisation (cooperating institution or IFAD itself) administers the loan, periodically reviews progress towards objectives, identifies key obstacles, helps find workable solutions and makes strategic changes, as required.

### Sustainability
The likelihood that the positive effects of a project (such as assets, skills, facilities or improved services) will persist for an extended period after the external assistance ends.

### Target
A specified objective that indicates the number, timing and location of that which is to be realised.

### Target group
The specific group for whose benefit the project or programme is undertaken, closely related to impact and relevance.

### Triangulation
Use of a variety of sources, methods or field team members to cross check and validate data and information to limit biases.

### Validity
The extent to which something is reliable and actually measures up to or makes a correct claim. This includes data collection strategies and instruments.

### Validation
The process of cross-checking to ensure that the data obtained from one monitoring method are confirmed by the data obtained from a different method.

### Vertical logic
A summary of the project that spells out the causal relationships between, on the one hand, each level of the objective hierarchy (inputs-outputs, outputs-purpose, purpose-goal) and, on the other, the critical assumptions and uncertainties that affect these linkages and lie outside the project manager’s control.

### Work plan
A detailed document stating which activities are going to be carried out in a given time period, how the activities will be carried out and how the activities relate to the common objectives and vision. The work plan is designed according to the logical framework and contains a description in each cell of the work plan table of each activity and output, its verifiable indicators, the means of verification and its assumptions.
List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix
Table of Contents of Annex B

B.1 Reviewing an Existing Logical Framework Matrix 3
B.2 Reworked Logframe Matrix 10

This Annex is useful for:

- Managers - to help when revising the project design and its logical framework;
- Consultants - to ensure that the proposed project design is based on good design practice;
- IFAD and cooperating institution staff - to check that the proposed project design meets "good practice" standards.
This Annex provides an example of how to develop and improve the logframe matrix for an IFAD-supported project by giving a “before revision” and “after revision” comparison. The “before” logframe matrix is shown with comments on the problems and how these could be overcome. The “after” logframe matrix shows the partial reworking of the original logframe matrix. The example is based on several IFAD-supported projects and so represents a fictitious project.

There is no such thing as a perfect logframe matrix. The best results come from considerable discussion among key stakeholders, guided by facilitators who have a good understanding of the project context and logframe planning. If the project strategy is put to use by stakeholders after the discussions, then the logframe matrix is simply a support and a reminder.

The intention of this Annex is to provide ideas and tips about the types of issues that require attention and discussion when developing a good logframe matrix. The reworked example is not intended to be perfect or complete. Different people, including those very experienced with logframes, will often have different ideas and opinions about how to structure a project. Therefore, to develop a good logframe requires several rounds of discussion and revision.

The logical framework approach and matrix are discussed in detail in Section 3.

B.1 Reviewing an Existing Logical Framework Matrix

Table B-1 gives an example of a logical framework matrix that has several weaknesses and could be improved.

When you review a logframe matrix or develop one from the start it is helpful to keep in mind its following three uses:

1. Providing a general overview of the project;
2. Providing the basis for project implementation, including the development of annual work plans and budgets;
3. Providing an overview of how project performance will be monitored and evaluated.

The art of developing a useful logframe matrix is to make it specific and clear but not too long. Remember that the detail needed for implementation will be more than what is required to provide an overview for those appraising a project for funding. The lack of adequate detail is why project staff often do not use a logframe matrix to guide project implementation.

When you begin to review or develop a new logframe matrix, it is a good idea first to develop a visual overview of the project's objective hierarchy. Figure B-1 shows this for the original matrix and Figure B-2 for the reworked example. Such a visual overview makes it easier to understand how the different parts of the project fit together.

When working with a group of stakeholders to develop the project objective hierarchy and matrix, visualise the objective hierarchy on a large wall by using separate cards for each element. The cards can then be moved around as people discuss the best way to structure the project. See the logic testing questions in Table 3-4 in Section 3.4, that can be used to guide this process of refining the structure.
Table B-1 shows the original logframe matrix, with numbers to indicate weak areas. Table B-2 analyses these key weaknesses. In summary, they are:

1. The whole matrix is not detailed and specific enough to provide an adequate overview of the project.
2. There are no activities specified.
3. Inputs are shown for the whole project rather than being specified for particular activities.
4. The outputs are really project components and hence are at too high a level and are too general to be considered outputs.
5. Targets are only partially developed.
6. The risks and assumptions are overly simplified.

Figure B-1. Visual overview of the original project objective hierarchy

- **Goal**: Improve the livelihood of 35,000 families

- **Purpose**
  - Small farms enabled to intensify and diversify crop production
  - Landless families increase livestock, fish and income-generating activities as well as homestead gardening

- **Outputs** (Components)
  - Agricultural Development
  - Community Development
  - Rural Credit
  - Community Infrastructure

- **Inputs**
  - Project coordinator, PMU, research, extension, training, transport, construction, etc.
Table B-1. Example of the original logframe for an agricultural development project (see Table B-2 for comments corresponding to numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Monitoring</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve the livelihood of 35,000 families</td>
<td>Family income increased by 40% in real terms</td>
<td>Baseline and evaluation surveys</td>
<td>• Economic and political suitability exists. • Free market policies exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small farmers enabled to intensify and diversify crop production</td>
<td>• Intensity of cropping increased 15% • Non-rice crops area increased 10% • Yields increased 25%</td>
<td>Surveys and monitoring of target farmers’ group members and control families</td>
<td>• Credit, markets and infrastructure are available. • Department of agriculture extension staff are motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in landless families’ livestock, fish and income-generating activities as well as homestead gardening</td>
<td>• Poultry/Duck numbers doubled • Fish catch increased 45% • Homestead garden output doubled • Off-farm income doubled</td>
<td>Surveys and monitoring of target families and control families</td>
<td>• NGOs/Department of agriculture extension work together effectively. • Specific government departments support project activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Component) Outputs</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Means of Verification</th>
<th>Risks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural development</td>
<td>• New HYV adopted by 30,000 farmers • New crops adopted by 30,000 farmers • 80 groups involved in marketing • 30 embankment/drainage schemes completed • STWs purchased by target farmers’ groups using project credit</td>
<td>• Baseline survey records and monitoring by PMU • Baseline survey/technical assistance records and monitoring by PMU • NGO monitoring • Department of agriculture’s engineering records • PMU credit monitoring</td>
<td>Technology is not available. Department of agriculture is unable to deliver technology. (same risk as above) Marketing groups do not work. Not enough suitable schemes exist. Target farmers’ groups cannot manage joint investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>• 3,000 permanent target farmers’ groups established by NGOs • 3,000 target families (some already established) managed by NGOs • District NGOs credit delivery doubled • Livestock, fish and homestead technology, marketing and other income-generating activities adopted by group members</td>
<td>• NGO monitoring and PMU identification • NGO monitoring and PMU identification • Credit monitoring • NGO monitoring</td>
<td>Contract/Collaboration with department of agriculture extension is problematic. Specific government department staff is unable to meet requests from groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Rural credit | • USD 1.5 million revolving fund disbursed by NGOs for target family groups  
• USD 4.0 million credit line disbursed by national credit banks/NGOs for target farmers’ groups  
• USD 0.7 million risk fund established | National credit bank/NGO records  
PMU monitoring | District NGOs fail to meet targets  
National credit banks do not disburse credit to NGOs or groups. |
| Community infrastructure | • Upgrading of 150 km road  
• Sealing 25 km road  
• 35 markets  
• 15 landing stages  
• 20 training facilities | Department agriculture’s engineering records  
PMU monitoring | Primary stakeholder participation is lacking. Problems with operation and maintenance exist. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>MOV</th>
<th>Risks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Qualified project coordinator appointed and special account set up | By loan signature  
At loan effectiveness | PMU  
Routine reporting | Suitably qualified and committed person is not available. |
| PMU/MU office established and staffed | At loan effectiveness | Routine reporting |  |
| NGO contracts agreed and activated | 11 contracts | Routine reporting | Contract delays occur. |
| Department engineering project director’s office and account set up | Within one month of loan effectiveness | Routine reporting |  |
| Technical assistance contract agreed and personnel appointed | 3 long-term for PMU  
2 long-term for department | Routine reporting | Delay occurs due to contractual procedures. |
| Research  
Adaptive trials | 25 research contracts  
20 workshops | PMU  
Project implementation reports |  |
| Extension inputs  
• Demonstration plots  
• Farm visits/Field day  
• Video shows  
• Agricultural fairs | Numbers:  
• 5,000  
• 1,000  
• 350  
• 150 | Block supervisor/technical assistance records  
PMU monitoring | Problems occur in the fund flow from PMU to district. |
Training of:
- agricultural extension management staff
- District and local extension programming committee members
- agricultural extension district, community and block staff
- Project management committee
- Group leaders (trained by NGOs)
- Women homestead gardeners/farmers

Refer to Appendix 7 [Note: this is an appendix in the original project appraisal report]

Routine reporting
PMU monitoring

Qualified trainers are not available.

Physical inputs:
- Transport
- Extension
- Construction materials

Numbers of:
- 25 vehicles/150 motorcycles
- 1,200 kits
As per specifications

Project management reports

Procurement delays occur.

Financial inputs:
- NGO service fees
- Revolving funds
- Credit

- USD 150/50/25 per group
- USD 1.2 million (disbursed to NGOs)
- USD 4.0 million (disbursed to national credit banks)

Project management reports

National credit bank contribution is not provided.
Use own funds totally.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>General structure of the matrix</td>
<td>No activities are specified and the outputs are, in reality, project components. Inputs are given for the entire project and not for specific activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Generality and the fragmented nature of the matrix content</td>
<td>The matrix provides only a very general overview of the project. In this form, the matrix provides insufficient detail to be a useful guide for project implementation. It is also not clear what is to be achieved under each of the components (outputs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Contents of the second column of the matrix – targets</td>
<td>The targets do not adequately cover the different aspects of the project. They focus too much on quantitative outputs and inputs and not enough on outcomes and qualitative information. The targets do not fully cover the scope of the project for each component, so it is difficult to understand the project fully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Contents of the third column – monitoring/means of verification</td>
<td>The monitoring mechanisms are very general and so provide little guidance for setting up the M&amp;E system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Contents of the fourth column – assumptions/risks</td>
<td>At the goal and purpose levels, assumptions are used. At the output level, risks are used. There is no rationale for this, as “assumptions” can be used at all levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>Gender and other equity differences</td>
<td>There is no indication from the matrix that gender and other equity differences have been specifically considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>Generality of the goal</td>
<td>The goal “Improving livelihoods” is an extremely broad goal. Yet the project does not intend to directly tackle, for example, the health and education aspects of improving livelihoods. So the project implicitly has a narrower focus than the full livelihood goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>Targets for the goal level</td>
<td>Increased income is a poor indicator of the overall project goal. Income itself does not necessarily contribute to improved livelihoods. It depends how the increased income is used and how household expenses and work patterns have changed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Assumptions for the goal level</td>
<td>The assumptions are so general that they would apply to virtually any project anywhere in the world. So they are not very useful for guiding thinking about the long-term sustainability of the project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Purpose level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>In the original example, there is little difference between the two purposes or between them and the agricultural development output.</td>
<td>- There are different ways to structure a logframe matrix. However, for IFAD-supported projects, it is suggested that a separate purpose for each component be used. It is also important to think carefully about whether a project is primarily to achieve a physical change, such as increased agricultural production, or whether it is to focus on institutional and community capacity and the process of development. A good project will achieve both. However, it is important to ensure that capacity-building and institutional development processes are made explicit in the logframe matrix.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Purpose-level targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The purpose-level targets are essentially targets for specific aspects of agricultural development. They do not address the issue of increased capacity for self-reliant agricultural, economic and social development.</td>
<td>- At the goal and purpose levels, it is important to ask broader questions about institutional change and how achieving specific production targets are actually contributing to improved livelihoods. See the performance questions for the goal and purpose levels in the reworked example.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>As mentioned above, what are called outputs in the original example are really the project components. If you look at the outputs as given, it is very difficult to get an overview of what the project aims to achieve. The outputs are written only as a title/heading and not as a result or objective.</td>
<td>- Outputs should refer to a relatively specific achievement of the project. They should also be used to give a clear picture of the scope of each of the project components/purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Agricultural development output

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It is not clear what will be achieved under this component. The targets are unclear.</td>
<td>- The reworked example shows clear outputs for the project under this purpose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Agricultural development targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>“New crops adopted by 30,000 farmers” is a poor indicator. Taken literally it gives no information about what crops have been adopted, to what extent or how successfully.</td>
<td>- It is necessary to make clear that information must be collected about what particular crops have been adopted and to what extent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Agricultural development assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The risks relate to achieving the component (output) and not to the contribution of the component to the purpose and goal. “Department of agriculture is unable to deliver technology” is an assumption relating to the achievement of the component. “Technology is not available” is potentially a “killer assumption”.</td>
<td>- In general, assumptions should relate to how an activity contributes to an output and how an output contributes to a purpose and so forth. For example, in this project, it is being assumed that extra production will, at least in part, be sold to increase household financial resources. The contribution of the increased agricultural production is based on an assumption about sufficient market demand and prices for the production. Clearly identifying assumptions is often a difficult part of the project planning process. Either the project should be changed to ensure that technology is available as a result of project efforts or the purpose and goal need adjusting to be less ambitious.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community development output

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>It is not just the community where capacity development is required. For the project to be successful, the department of agriculture and private sector also need to build their capacity.</td>
<td>- This output becomes an institutional development component at the purpose level of the matrix.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community development targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Most of the targets provided are activity or low-level output targets and do not answer the “so what” question.</td>
<td>- Make sure there are performance questions that will provide information about, for example, how successful farmers’ groups are in supporting their members to adopt new farming practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community development targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>“NGO and PMU monitoring” says nothing about what methods or even the general approach that will be used. The MOVs given are so simplified that they provide virtually no information to guide M&amp;E.</td>
<td>- Try to be as specific as possible about what monitoring mechanisms and sources of information will be used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following points cover some key issues in developing a good matrix and are discussed in reference to the example.

1. **How to detail it.** To outline a large project fully in a logframe matrix does require a considerable amount of detail and quite a few pages. To be a useful guide for project implementation, such detail is necessary. For large projects, each purpose (component) could be considered a separate sub-project with its own logframe matrix. To provide a brief overview of the project, you can use only the goal and purpose levels as illustrated in the reworked example.

2. **Structuring the matrix.** The difficulty of dealing with large projects using a simple four-level matrix is discussed in Section 3. This problem is very clear from the original example. In the reworked example, you can see how having a number of purposes – each with outputs and activities – shows more clearly and exactly what a project will be trying to achieve.

3. **Process- or product-driven.** In the past, rural development tended to focus on products – irrigation schemes, yield increases, infrastructure, etc. More recent approaches are increasingly concerned with building the capacity of people and institutions to guide their own development process. It is much more difficult to be specific about capacity development than, for example, 50 kilometres of road constructed. In the reworked example, under Component Purpose 3, you will find some ideas about how to express capacity development objectives and how to monitor them. The original example falls into the trap of only including those things than can be easily measured and hence focuses on products at the expense of capacity-development processes.

4. **The sideways logic.** It is important to remember that outputs from one part of the project will often be necessary inputs or conditions for another part of the project. The reworked example shows that the rural infrastructure component is an important contribution to the other purposes (components) to be achieved. For example, roads are critical for marketing and enabling access to villages for extension activities.

5. **Where to locate outputs and activities.** Sometimes it is not always clear where an output or set of activities best belongs. In the reworked example, the output “irrigation and drainage scheme expanded and maintained” has a logical home with either the agricultural production or the infrastructure purpose. Just choose one and develop the logic based on that choice. When dealing with activities like training, it is best to put training that relates to a specific output under that output. For example, training of farmers in post-harvest management should go under that output, not a general output related to training. The basic idea is to place all the activities necessary to achieve an output under

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**B.2 Reworked Logframe Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural credit targets</th>
<th>These targets are all input targets and will not provide information about the outcomes or impact of the rural credit scheme.</th>
<th>Establish performance questions and indicators that will provide information about repayment and for what the credit is being used.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>Inputs should relate to activities and not the whole project. The original example does not have an activity level.</td>
<td>The use of the second and third columns in the matrix change at the activity level. The second column is used for inputs and the third column for budget information. Monitoring activities is necessary, but it is easy to track what activities have been completed through basic project records. Consequently it is not necessary to provide details about indicators and monitoring mechanisms at the activity level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that output. If an activity relates to several outputs, then it is usually best to split it up into several specific activities.

6. **Performance questions and target indicators.** You will notice in the reworked example that the second column has both performance questions and target indicators. The performance questions look broadly at what the project should be achieving and are particularly useful where this cannot be monitored using simple quantitative indicators. These questions are especially important at the purpose and goal level where it is often more difficult to have simple quantitative indicators. Diverse qualitative and quantitative information will often have to be gathered and analysed to answer these questions. The target indicators help specify precisely what the project should achieve.

7. **Aggregation of outputs.** What the project achieves at a purpose level is an aggregation of all the outputs that lie under that particular purpose. However, it will not always be possible to have sensible aggregate indicators. For example, at the purpose level for agricultural production there is no single indicator that can give a complete summary of increased agricultural production. Instead, it is necessary to talk about the increased area and yields of specific crops. This means that purpose-level indicators may be a compilation of the separate contributions (indicators) for each of the outputs.

8. **Indicative targets.** Increasingly, projects are implemented using a process approach that provides the opportunity for the outputs and activities to be determined with primary stakeholders during implementation. In the first draft of the logframe matrix it will then be necessary to use indicative outputs, activities and indicators.

9. **Monitoring mechanisms.** Monitoring mechanisms will often be the same for different purposes and outputs. For example, a household survey may provide information for many different indicators and performance questions.

10. **Assumptions and risks.** Assumptions should not be only about external conditions but also about the internal logic of the project strategy. For example, when increasing agricultural production to increase income, the assumption is that there is a market for the produce. Remember that if an assumption is highly risky, then the project design should be adjusted to lower the risk.

11. **Gender and other equity differences.** It is important to check that gender and other equity differences have been adequately addressed in both the design and the monitoring and evaluation of the project. Because equity is an issue that cross-cuts many project activities, outputs and components, it is often better that it be integrated rather than included as a separate element. However, this means it may be desirable also to have some cross-cutting objectives and indicators for the project.
Figure B-2. Visual overview of the objective hierarchy for the reworked logframe matrix

**Improved livelihoods for 35,000 poor families through increased food security and better income-generation opportunities**

- **Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified**
  - Rice production increased
    - Construct new rice terraces.
    - Introduce new varieties.
    - Organise input supplies.
    - Farm and home garden forestry developed
    - Farm and home garden forestry developed
    - Farm and home garden forestry developed
  - Farm and home garden forestry developed
  - Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified
    - Undertake participatory research.
    - Provide extension support.
    - Organise input supplies.
  - Marketing to local regions improved
    - Research market opportunities.
    - Develop trading relationships.
    - Establish transport system.
    - Post-harvest management improved
    - Non-agricultural small businesses developed
    - Value-adding enterprises initiated
    - Increased capacity for business planning

- **Income Generation Increased and Diversified**
  - Farmer support established and operating effectively
  - Community microfinance groups operating effectively
    - Establish and train community facilitators.
  - Rural Development Institutions Strengthened
    - Conduct organisational assessment.
    - Train staff.
    - Introduce performance incentives.
    - Install facilities and equipment.
  - Rural Credit Use Expanded
    - Central bank and revolving fund in place and operating effectively
    - Irrigation and drainage schemes expanded
      - Design new scheme.
      - Implement physical works programme.
      - Establish and train water users' associations.
  - Rural Infrastructure Built and Maintained
    - Market centres built and upgraded
    - Community training centres built and equipped
    - Roads extended and maintained
      - Establish construction priorities.
      - Issue building contracts.
      - Establish maintenance.
  - Project Effectively Implemented
    - Project staff and partners working as a committed team
      - Establish roles and responsibilities.
      - Develop individual work plans.
    - Participatory planning and M&E systems operational
      - Design M&E system.
      - Train stakeholders in M&E.
      - Conduct annual project review and work planning.
  - Financial resources properly managed and accounted for

- **Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified**
  - Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified
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    - Provide extension support.
    - Organise input supplies.
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      - Organise input supplies.
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    - Farm and home garden forestry developed
  - Marketing to local regions improved
    - Research market opportunities.
    - Develop trading relationships.
    - Establish transport system.
    - Post-harvest management improved
    - Non-agricultural small businesses developed
    - Value-adding enterprises initiated
    - Increased capacity for business planning
  - Marketing to local regions improved
    - Research market opportunities.
    - Develop trading relationships.
    - Establish transport system.
    - Post-harvest management improved
    - Non-agricultural small businesses developed
    - Value-adding enterprises initiated
    - Increased capacity for business planning
  - Capacity of department of agriculture to support local development processes strengthened
    - Conduct organisational assessment.
    - Train staff.
    - Introduce performance incentives.
    - Install facilities and equipment.
  - Farmer support established and operating effectively
  - Community microfinance groups operating effectively
    - Establish and train community facilitators.
  - Rural Development Institutions Strengthened
    - Conduct organisational assessment.
    - Train staff.
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  - Financial resources properly managed and accounted for

- **Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified**
  - Agricultural Production Increased and Diversified
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      - Train stakeholders in M&E.
      - Conduct annual project review and work planning.
  - Financial resources properly managed and accounted for
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Performance Questions &amp; Target Indicators</th>
<th>Monitoring Mechanisms &amp; Information Sources</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improved livelihoods for 35,000 poor families in the Rutunga province through increased food security and enhanced income-generating opportunities | Performance questions:  
• For whom has food security changed and in which ways?  
• How has the purchasing power of target households changed?  
• How have project interventions influenced meeting the needs for housing, education and health?  
• How has the diversity and size of the local economy changed?  
• How have interventions affected the workloads, roles and well-being of different household members (women, men, young, old)?  
• How equitably have different social and economic groups benefited from the project’s interventions?  
Target indicators:  
• 75% of families with food secure under average seasonal conditions  
• 30% increase in household expenditure on housing, education and health  
• Equal livelihood improvements for female- and male-headed households | • Sample household surveys (baseline, mid-term, end of project and three years after completion)  
• Participatory impact monitoring to complement household surveys  
• Field observations by project and implementing partner staff  
• Analysis of relevant government statistics  
• Project monitoring reports  
• Analysis of local economic activity (baseline, mid-term, end of project and three years after completion) | • Continued and sufficient market demand exists for locally produced commodities and other products.  
• Project benefits are not offset by declining government services and social benefits  
• Increased agricultural production and economic activity is not offset by the demands of population growth.  
• Agricultural production can be profitable in a context of declining terms of trade for agricultural commodities.  
• Productive capacity of natural resources is not degraded by intensification.  
• People and institutions have the capacity to adapt to continually changing circumstances.  
• Benefits are not offset by disruption of traditional livelihood strategies. |
| Component Purposes | Performance Questions & Target Indicators                                                                                     | Monitoring Mechanisms & Information Sources                                                                                           | Assumptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1) Agricultural production | Performance questions:  
• How have the diversity, level of production and productivity of agriculture changed in the target area?  
• What innovations have been developed or recommended and to what level have they been adopted?  
• How have the environmental impacts of agriculture changed? | • Land use and cropping pattern records kept by participating communities, farmers’ groups and department of agriculture  
• Sample surveys of crop yields and gross margin analysis undertaken by department of agriculture  
• Participatory monitoring systems established with farmers’ groups | • The productive capacity of the area is sufficient to meet food needs and provide surplus for sale.  
• Sufficient market demand and adequate price for produce exist.  
• Increased diversity and intensity of production is financially profitable. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target indicators:</th>
<th>Environmental impact assessment process put in place</th>
<th>Questions in household/farm surveys</th>
<th>Changes do not have a disproportionate negative impact on overall labour use at the household level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Area of horticulture and vegetable production increased to 4,000 hectares</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 60% of farmers achieving 70% of target yields in years with average seasonal conditions</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Area of non-rice crops increased by at least 10% for small farmers</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 70% of farmers adopting at least one environmentally sustainable practice</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chemical load in Besha River reduced to target levels</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (See also the indicators for each output.)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental impact assessment process put in place</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions in household/farm surveys</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Income generation</td>
<td>• Level of increased income is sufficient to make a significant difference in household ability to purchase livelihood needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater market access, chain management, value adding, rise in non-agricultural small enterprise development and more diverse means of household income</td>
<td>• Food and other livelihood necessities are available for purchase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What value-adding or post-harvest initiatives have been established and what have the economic consequences been?</td>
<td>• Project-induced changes in the local economy increase household income by more than costs increase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What changes have occurred in the movement of products from the local area?</td>
<td>• Increased economic activity flow benefits poor households and not middlemen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In what ways and how successfully have markets for particular products been developed?</td>
<td>• Changes do not have a disproportionate negative impact on overall labour use at the household level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How have the levels and diversity of household income generation changed?</td>
<td>• Level of increased income is sufficient to make a significant difference in household ability to purchase livelihood needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How have household roles changed?</td>
<td>• Food and other livelihood necessities are available for purchase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target indicators:</td>
<td>• Project-induced changes in the local economy increase household income by more than costs increase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 60% of households benefitting from at least a 20% increase in purchasing power</td>
<td>• Increased economic activity flow benefits poor households and not middlemen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 100% increase in off-farm employment opportunities</td>
<td>• Changes do not have a disproportionate negative impact on overall labour use at the household level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Institutional development</td>
<td>• Level of increased income is sufficient to make a significant difference in household ability to purchase livelihood needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government, private sector and NGO sector institutions are able to support sustainable agricultural and economic development effectively</td>
<td>• Food and other livelihood necessities are available for purchase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance questions:</td>
<td>• Project-induced changes in the local economy increase household income by more than costs increase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In what ways has the performance of the agricultural research and extension system changed?</td>
<td>• Increased economic activity flow benefits poor households and not middlemen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organisational assessment of the department of agriculture activity (baseline, mid-term, end of project and three years after completion)</td>
<td>• Changes do not have a disproportionate negative impact on overall labour use at the household level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reporting by NGOs, farmers’ and women’s groups</td>
<td>• Level of increased income is sufficient to make a significant difference in household ability to purchase livelihood needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The department of agriculture has sufficient financial and human resources to support development.</td>
<td>• Food and other livelihood necessities are available for purchase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased business involvement will not exploit disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>• Project-induced changes in the local economy increase household income by more than costs increase.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• How successful have the farmers’ and women’s groups and NGOs been in supporting agricultural development and new income-generating activities?
• In what ways are private sector businesses contributing to development?

**Target indicators:**
• New strategic plan and annual work plans for department of agriculture effectively implemented
• 500 farmers’ groups operating effectively
• 20 NGO organisations effectively supporting development
• 300 women’s enterprise groups operating effectively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4) Rural credit</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural credit use expanded</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5) Rural infrastructure</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of rural infrastructure</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6) Project management</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
<th>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective project management</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
<td>Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Participatory impact monitoring of NGOs and farmers’ and women’s groups
• Field observations by project and implementing partner staff
• Monitoring of private sector activities

• Farmers/Women are willing to participate in the support groups
• The incentives for adopting new agricultural-production or income-generating activities are enough for people to be interested in the extension support offered by the farmers’ groups and department of agriculture.
### Component 1. Agricultural Production - Outputs and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs and Activities</th>
<th>Performance Questions &amp; Target Indicators</th>
<th>Monitoring Mechanisms &amp; Information Sources</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Output 1.1 Horticultural and vegetable production increased** | Key performance questions  
• To what extent have horticultural and vegetable production increased?  
• Who is benefiting from this increase and in what ways?  
• What are the environmental impacts of increased production and how are they being managed?  
Key target indicators:  
• 2,000 hectares of orchards established and producing  
• 3,000 hectares of mixed vegetable production developed  
• 15,000 farmers participating in at least one form of horticultural or vegetable production  
• 10,000 families benefiting from additional seasonal labour | • Land use and cropping pattern records kept by participating communities, farmers' groups and agricultural department  
• Sample surveys of crop yields and gross margin analysis undertaken by department of agriculture  
• Participatory monitoring systems established with farmers' groups  
• Environmental impact assessment process put in place | • Horticultural and vegetable crops are a financially, environmentally and socially sound way of increasing overall agricultural productivity.  
• The human resources for successful intensive production can be developed.  
• Farmers are willing to adopt new cropping systems. |

### Activities for Output 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Inputs</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1.1.1 - Through participatory research with farmers, identify optimal horticultural and vegetable crops and appropriate production systems.** | • 25 person months of external research consultancy support  
• Research and development coordinator  
• Resources for 20 field research sites  
• Training for 20 department of agriculture staff in participatory research methods  
• Training for 30 department of agriculture staff in latest production methods for potential crops | Include costs for activities here. | • Production systems appropriate to the local conditions can be developed. |
### Outputs and Activities

#### 1.1.2 - Establish and implement cooperative extension scheme between department of agriculture, private sector, farmers' groups and NGOs.

- Participatory extension coordinator/facilitator
- Contracts for extension support given to private sector and NGO groups
- Training for 200 people in participatory extension and for the trainer
- Mobilisation support for farmer field schools

**Performance Questions & Target Indicators**

**Monitoring Mechanisms & Information Sources**

**Assumptions**

- Sufficient agricultural extension capacity is available to support farmers in adopting new cropping systems.

#### 1.1.3 - Organise input supplies.

**Performance Questions & Target Indicators**

**Monitoring Mechanisms & Information Sources**

**Assumptions**

- Include costs for activities here.

#### Outputs and Activities

**Output 1.2 Increased rice production**

**Activities for Output 1.2**

- **1.2.1 - Construct new rice terraces.**
- **1.2.2 - Introduce new varieties.**

**Performance Questions & Target Indicators**

**Monitoring Mechanisms & Information Sources**

**Assumptions**

- Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.

**Key Inputs**

**Costs**

**Assumptions**

- Example of matrix structure – details not included in this example.
## Component 3. Institutional Development - Outputs and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs and Activities</th>
<th>Performance Questions &amp; Target Indicators</th>
<th>Monitoring Mechanisms &amp; Information Sources</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Output 3.1 Capacity strengthened of department of agriculture to support local development process** | Key performance questions:  
* How successful has the department of agriculture been in facilitating agricultural and economic development in the province?  
* How satisfied are key clients with the service and support of the department?  
Key target indicators:  
* All staff with revised job descriptions, performance targets and work plans  
* Management structures, equipment and facilities in place to enable staff to carry out responsibilities adequately  
* 75% of staff adequately carrying out their work plans and meeting performance targets | Activity and performance monitoring system established within department of agriculture  
* Interviews with key clients (farmers, businesses, NGOs)  
* Organisational assessment of the department of agriculture activity (baseline, mid-term, end of project and three years after completion)  
* Participatory impact monitoring with farmers’ groups | Department of agriculture can and will play a key role in the development process.  
* The department is able to reorient towards being more client oriented and working in partnership with other stakeholders including the private sector. |

### Activities for Output 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Inputs</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1.1 - Conduct organisational assessment and design organisational capacity-building strategy.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* 4 months of institutional development specialist input | Include costs for activities here. |  
* The incentives and human resources are adequate for improved performance to be achieved. |
| **3.1.2 - Implement training programme for 300 staff.** |  
* Training coordinator  
* Funding for 50 staff to attend international training courses  
* 22 months of external training specialist input  
* Training logistic and workshop costs | Include costs for activities here. |  
* Conditions exist within the department of agriculture for staff to apply new capacities and skills. |
| **3.1.3 - Introduce performance incentives.** |  
* Staff performance assessment coordinator  
* Incentives payment scheme costs | Include costs for activities here. |  
* Performance monitoring system is in place.  
* Managers have sufficient skills to establish and run performance incentive system. |
### Outputs and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.4 – Install and upgrade facilities and equipment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 four-wheel drives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 motor bikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 field stations upgraded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 new field stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office equipment and computer system upgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and laboratory equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Include costs for activities here.

- Capacity to use and maintain facilities exists or is developed.

#### Performance Questions & Target Indicators

**Output 3.2 Farmer support groups established and operating self-reliantly**

**Key performance questions:**
- How successful are farmer support groups in enabling their members to improve agricultural production?

**Key target indicators:**
- 3,000 farmer support groups operating effectively
- 60% of farmers changing practices as a result of interaction with farmer support groups

**Activities for Output 3.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Inputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers' group development coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 support contracts for NGOs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Include costs for activities here.

- NGO organisations have credibility with farmers.

#### Monitoring Mechanisms & Information Sources

- Group record keeping and monitoring system
- NGO and department of agriculture group support the monitoring system that is developed.
- Participatory impact monitoring with farmers' groups

- Adequate NGO and department of agriculture capacity exists to support farmers' groups.
- Farmers have time to attend group meetings.

#### Assumptions

- Adequate NGO and department of agriculture capacity exists to support farmers' groups.
- Farmers have time to attend group meetings.
List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix
Table of Contents of Annex C

C.1 Considerations When Developing an M&E Matrix 3
C.2 Core M&E Activities in the Example 5
C.3 The M&E Matrix Example 6

This Annex is useful for:

- Project managers – to supervise development of the M&E system;
- M&E staff – to guide project implementers in agreeing what to monitor and evaluate.
This Annex provides an example of the M&E matrix (see C.3, Table C-2) that was introduced in Section 2 and explained in Section 5.

To establish a good M&E system, you will need considerably more detail about how to gather and use information than can be summarised in the logframe matrix. Using the M&E matrix is one way of identifying and documenting this additional information.

It is important to recognise that an M&E matrix is only part of an overall M&E plan, as it only considers what is needed to monitor and evaluate the objective hierarchy. It provides detailed information about how the goal or particular components, outputs and activities will be monitored and evaluated. An M&E plan will include other events that make it possible to understand the project context, reflect and learn lessons.

Completing the M&E matrix requires detailed knowledge of the project and the project context. As the example in Table C-2 is hypothetical, it cannot include the level of specific details that would exist in a real project situation. Consequently, it is more general than a real matrix would be. The example aims to provide an overview of important aspects of the matrix, rather than present a fully detailed matrix. The example is based on the logframe matrix developed in Annex B.

C.1 Considerations When Developing an M&E Matrix

As you read through the M&E matrix example, there are several points to keep in mind. These might be of use to you in understanding the example matrix but also when developing your own M&E matrix.

From data to lessons, understanding and decisions. When developing the matrix, it is important to keep in mind how you plan to move from data collection to explaining success or failure, creating understanding about particular issues with stakeholders and, finally, making decisions. In the example, the proposed annual workshop on food security will enable you to reach a decision based on focused reflections. This workshop will also allow you to identify lessons learned that can inform next year's work.

The matrix at different levels in the objective hierarchy. In the example, you will notice that at lower levels in the objective hierarchy it becomes much easier to be very specific. For example, monitoring the length of main and secondary irrigation canals dug is a more straightforward task than assessing overall contribution to people’s livelihoods. The further up the objective hierarchy you go, the more analysis and synthesis of different types and sources of information are required. Note that in the formal logframe matrix (see Section 3), indicators and monitoring mechanisms are not entered into the logframe for activities. Instead, resource inputs and costs are used. However, in practice you will still need to monitor the activity level so you still need to plan for this. The M&E matrix can be used to plan what is needed for the activity level as well as for the goal level.

Triangulation and validation. When deciding what data-gathering and analysis methods to use, think about how you can ensure that data is reliable. Triangulation means getting information about the same topic in a number of different ways. Validation is what you achieve by then cross-checking the information. For example, from the participatory impact monitoring (PIM) with women’s groups you might get feedback that a particular new enterprise is very time-consuming in relation to the income earned. If you get the same feedback from household surveys and field observations of staff, you can be more confident of the information. On the other hand, if you are getting conflicting information from these different sources, then you will need to investigate further to understand why there are differing opinions.
You can also use the field records of agricultural extension staff or the government as sources of valuable information for project monitoring. However, positive aspects may be exaggerated and problems overlooked – an inevitable human tendency. It is thus important to have methods in place for checking and validating information.

**Existing information and data-gathering systems.** Most projects will have access to the already existing data-gathering and statistical systems of the government or another agency. It is critical to see how these can be used. It may be that for a small investment, existing systems can be improved or modified to meet the project’s monitoring requirements.

**Technology use.** Consider carefully where and to what extent information technology can be effectively used. In the example, the increased areas of new crops could potentially be monitored using remote sensing and geographic information systems.

**Specific data vs. the big picture.** Specific indicators provide fragmented bits of information. To thoroughly understand the project, its successes, failures and lessons, you need to build up the overall story. This means integrating and analysing different pieces of information. The “analysis, reporting, feedback and change” column of the matrix provides a start for thinking about how this can be done.

**Primary data or secondary observations.** Information about changes in household capacity to meet education, health and housing needs could be gathered in two ways. A detailed household survey could be conducted (primary data) or community representatives and other key informants could be asked about their observations (secondary observation). Generally, primary data is more reliable but also much more time-consuming and costly to collect. An important skill in completing the M&E matrix is being able to balance the use of methods with the required level of information accuracy and the available resources. Think carefully about whether very detailed information is needed or whether an understanding of the general trend is adequate. If all you need is a general picture, then it might be possible to use qualitative methods in a cost-effective manner.

**Working with specialists.** To monitor some parts of a project may well require specialist advice and input. In the example, it is proposed that an economist be used to conduct a survey of the local economy. Likewise, monitoring the yields of different agricultural crops is a specialised task for an agronomist. There are now many people with strong experience in monitoring microfinance schemes. Wherever possible, try to draw on such expertise. The role of the M&E specialist is to link this expertise to the project’s M&E plan and assess how detailed the M&E needs to be for different parts of the project, given resource and time constraints.

**Aggregation of field data.** It will often be necessary to aggregate data from different field locations. In the example, agricultural extension staff are involved in recording changes in cropping patterns at district and local levels. If these aggregation processes are to generate reliable information, you will need to develop recording forms and aggregating systems. You can detail this in column five of the M&E matrix.
C.2 Core M&E Activities in the Example

Project M&E will require you to use different methods to meet a wide range of information needs. When developing a project M&E matrix, you may feel as if you are drowning in the detail of methods for each information need. However, a second look will reveal clusters of M&E activities. While the M&E matrix requires you to specify information needs and methods in detail, in practice they converge. This means that one M&E activity can be used to meet multiple information needs.

In the M&E matrix example (see C.3, Table C-2), you will find seven major recurring M&E activities (see the list below). For example, a household survey will provide information for a range of performance questions and indicators. Information from such a survey may be combined with information from other sources, such as participatory impact monitoring, to inform the annual project review.

The M&E matrix example focuses around seven major activities that form the basis of this project’s M&E.

1. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Three PRAs will be undertaken: the first, during the mobilisation phase; the second, one year prior to the mid-term review; and the third, two years after project completion. The PRA work will provide largely qualitative information about the needs, issues and perspectives of different stakeholder groups. The PRAs will be important in gathering information about unintended positive and negative impacts from the project.

2. Household and farm surveys. Sample household and farm surveys will be conducted to gather necessary baseline information, support the mid-term review and conduct an evaluation two years after project completion. In addition, more limited surveys will be conducted on a yearly basis.

3. Participatory impact monitoring (PIM). Participatory M&E systems will be established with key stakeholder groups involved in project implementation, such as farmers’ groups and women’s groups. This will involve the stakeholders in setting their own performance questions and questions, developing monitoring systems and participating in training to support implementation.

4. Stakeholder discussion groups. A series of stakeholder discussion groups will be established around key project components and outputs. These groups will help to analyse and review information, identify lessons learned and make recommendations about necessary changes in the project design.

5. Government statistics. Government normally collects a range of population, economic and agricultural statistics relevant to project M&E. Improvements in some aspects of this data gathering will be supported by the project and the reliability of the data will be assessed.

6. Field observations. All project and implementing partner staff will continually undertake systematic field observation. This will require producing and using key questions relevant to their area of work, training and information gathering and synthesis procedures.

7. Special studies. A range of special studies will be conducted, for example, on changes in the structure of the local economy. Some of these studies will involve external expertise. Where necessary, special studies will be undertaken to provide further information on important issues or opportunities that emerge from the regular monitoring work.

Each of these M&E activities needs to be well thought out and planned. When planning the complementary use of the activities, it is particularly important that you determine which ones can help provide information for which specific performance questions and indicators in the matrix.
C.3 The M&E Matrix Example

Table C-2 shows a partial example of an M&E matrix with annotations. The matrix includes several different levels from the objective hierarchy but has not been completed for the entire project. As mentioned above, it is a hypothetical example and so the details are not as precise as they should be in a real example. The purpose of the example is to give a general idea of the types of issues that need to be considered when developing an M&E matrix for a real project.

Table C-1 provides annotations for the M&E matrix example. The numbers in the table correspond to numbers in the matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How to present information</td>
<td>Think about how information needs to be presented for it to be meaningful. Information should usually be presented in comparison to a target, a prior state or the original state. For example, knowing only the number of households who are more food secure is not as informative as knowing the percentage and how the percentage has changed over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>In the example, responsibilities have not been included. However, for a real project it is important to identify who will undertake what aspect of the M&amp;E work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M&amp;E activities that provide information for several performance questions and indicators</td>
<td>Some M&amp;E activities, such as a household survey, PRA or PIM, can provide information for different evaluation questions and indicators. The M&amp;E matrix can help identify the different types of information that need to be gathered from such activities. The details of how these activities will be conducted and the resource implications should be outlined separately to the matrix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Combining and analysing information</td>
<td>In planning the M&amp;E system, try to think as much as possible about how different information can be combined and analysed to report progress and also to explain success and failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Review groups</td>
<td>Don’t let good information sit on the shelf. The project can set up different review or working groups or hold annual workshops with key stakeholders to track progress and identify lessons learned for different aspects of the project. These groups or events can then feed their conclusions into the annual project review process. The information needs of these groups can help refine the overall monitoring and information-gathering strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reasons</td>
<td>Collecting information about why part of the project is succeeding or failing is just as important as monitoring what has been achieved. Collecting information about reasons generally requires gathering and analysing qualitative information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Specialist studies</td>
<td>An economic study such as this is probably beyond the project team’s capacities and would require input from an economist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Technical methods for monitoring</td>
<td>Some indicators will require specialised technical methods related to particular disciplines and specialisations, in this case agronomy. It is very important that proper technical expertise be used when developing such monitoring mechanisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Participatory impact monitoring</td>
<td>Monitoring yields at the field level directly could be very costly. It may be possible to obtain adequate information through discussions, in this case agronomy. The technical expertise is critical and field inspections by project M&amp;E or other staff is one way to do so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Field inspections to validate data</td>
<td>Validating data is critical and field inspections by project M&amp;E or other staff is one way to do so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Using other sources of expertise</td>
<td>In this case, a university has been used to undertake a specific monitoring activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Setting criteria</td>
<td>An indicator will often include a quality, like “operating effectively”, that must be defined. In this case, it would be necessary to identify the criteria for effective operation, such as “regular meetings with 75% of members”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Monitoring by implementing partners</td>
<td>Much M&amp;E can be undertaken by implementing partners. However, it is important that they be involved in designing the M&amp;E system and be supported to carry out their responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C-2. Example of a partial M&E matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Improved livelihoods for 35,000 poor families in the Rutunga Province through increased food security and enhanced income-generating activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Questions and Related Targets</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For whom has food security changed and in which ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% of families with food security under average seasonal conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| How has the purchasing power of target households changed – in particular, for housing, education and health needs? | Changes in income, costs and expenditure patterns (disaggregated according to type of household and location) | Household expenditure patterns at start of project | Sample household surveys: baseline, mid-term, project completion, three years after completion | See details on household surveys, PRAs and PIM | Annual and mid-term review of project with key stakeholders about the project’s contribution to overall livelihood improvement in the context of other initiatives in the province |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30% increase in household expenditure on housing, education and health</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>PRAs: baseline, mid-term, project completion, three years after completion</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How have project interventions influenced the meeting of housing, education and health needs?</td>
<td>Changes expenditure patterns (disaggregated according to type of household and location)</td>
<td>Status at beginning of project</td>
<td>PIM</td>
<td>See details on PRAs and PIM.</td>
<td>Identification of necessary changes and options for better collaboration with other initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting by NGO and agricultural extension staff</td>
<td>PRAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nature of local economy at start of project</td>
<td>Economic analysis of local economy to be undertaken by specialist/economist: baseline, mid-term, project completion, three years after completion</td>
<td>Development of methodology and analysis by specialist/economist</td>
<td>Discussion of economic changes and developments during annual project review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of benefits of economic growth that stays local</td>
<td>Use of government statistics</td>
<td>Strengthening of government statistical methods for the province</td>
<td>Establishment of economic development task force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has the diversity and size of the local economy changed?</td>
<td>Changes in types and value of products and services being exchanged</td>
<td>Changes in workloads, roles and well-being disaggregated by gender, generation and household type</td>
<td>Household surveys</td>
<td>See details on household surveys, PRAs and PIM.</td>
<td>Regular discussion with women’s advisory groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PRAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PIM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have interventions affected the workloads, roles and well-being of different household members (women, men, young, old)?</td>
<td>Analysis of all above information in relation to household members and household type</td>
<td>Identification of particularly disadvantaged groups at start of project</td>
<td>Household surveys</td>
<td>See details on household surveys, PRAs and PIM.</td>
<td>Discussion of changes and developments during annual project review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PRAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PIM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Component (purpose) 1: Agricultural production – agricultural production increased, and diversified in a sustainable way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How have the cropping patterns in the target area changed?</td>
<td>Changes in cropping patterns disaggregated according to location and farmer type</td>
<td>Land use and agricultural activity information at start of project (from department of agriculture)</td>
<td>District record-keeping by department of agriculture field staff – quarterly data and twice-yearly and yearly analysis and reporting</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of horticulture and vegetable production increased to 4,000 hectares</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improve department of agriculture's record-keeping procedures, train staff and develop a new reporting format</td>
<td>Agricultural production task force will be established. It will meet every three months and review monitoring data. It will make a report for the annual project review meeting, covering progress, lessons learned and how any problems can be overcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of non-rice crops increased by at least 10% for small farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Install a database and geographic information system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much have farmers increased their yields of specific crops</td>
<td>Changes in average yields per crop (disaggregated by location, year and crop types)</td>
<td>Yields at start of project</td>
<td>Sample field surveys at harvest</td>
<td>Identify sample sites and train staff in field measurement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% of farmers achieving 70% of target yields in years with average seasonal conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PIM by farmers' groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What innovations/improved farming practices have been developed or recommended? What level of adoption has occurred? What are the reasons for adoption or non-adoption?</td>
<td>Types of innovations/practices that have been developed and recommended</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>District record-keeping by department of agriculture field staff – quarterly data and twice-yearly and yearly analysis and reporting</td>
<td>Improve department of agriculture's record-keeping procedures, train staff and develop a new reporting format</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of adoption of different innovations</td>
<td></td>
<td>PIM by farmers' groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for adoption or non-adoption</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Planning and Resources:**
- Forms, Planning, Training, Data Management, Expertise, Responsibilities

**Information Use:**
- Analysis, Reporting, Feedback, Change Processes, Responsibilities

**Data Gathering:**
- Methods, Frequency, Responsibilities

**Baseline Information:**
- Requirements and Status (if known)

**Information Needs and Indicators:**
- Changes in cropping patterns disaggregated according to location and farmer type
- Land use and agricultural activity information at start of project (from department of agriculture)
- District record-keeping by department of agriculture field staff – quarterly data and twice-yearly and yearly analysis and reporting
- Sample field surveys at harvest
- Identification of sample sites and train staff in field measurement
- Developing participatory yield-appraisal and recording system with farmers' groups

**Planning and Resources:**
- Improve department of agriculture's record-keeping procedures, train staff and develop a new reporting format
- Install a database and geographic information system
- Develop participatory yield-appraisal and recording system with farmers' groups

**Information Use:**
- Analysis, Reporting, Feedback, Change Processes, Responsibilities
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How have the environmental impacts of agriculture changed?</td>
<td>Level of adoption of environmentally sustainable practices</td>
<td>Extent of environmentally sustainable practices at start of project</td>
<td>District record-keeping by department of agriculture field staff - quarterly data and twice-yearly and yearly analysis and reporting</td>
<td>Improve department of agriculture’s record-keeping procedures, train staff and develop a new reporting format.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% of farmers adopt at least one environmentally sustainable practice</td>
<td>Chemical load in Besha River reduced to target levels</td>
<td></td>
<td>Field inspections by project staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of indicator chemicals</td>
<td>Levels at start of project</td>
<td>Chemical analysis of water samples every month</td>
<td>Give monitoring contract to Ingsar University.</td>
<td>Results will be discussed at provincial environmental committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Component 3: Institutional development – Output 1.1 farmer support groups established and operating self-reliantly

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How effectively are farmers’ groups supporting farmers to adopt new crops and improved farming systems?</td>
<td>Number of farmers’ groups</td>
<td>Number at start of project</td>
<td>Records from department of agriculture field staff and from officially registered groups receiving financial support from the project</td>
<td>Development of record-keeping forms</td>
<td>Analysis and discussion of success of farmers’ groups within agricultural extension support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 farmers’ groups operating effectively</td>
<td>Per cent of target farmers actively involved with a farmers’ group</td>
<td>Per cent at beginning of project</td>
<td>Recording-keeping by farmers’ groups and aggregation and synthesis by M&amp;E unit</td>
<td>Development of record-keeping forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of farmers’ groups meeting criteria for a successful group</td>
<td>Number at start of project</td>
<td>Reporting by department of agriculture field staff</td>
<td>Qualitative survey of farmers’ groups every two years</td>
<td>Establishment of criteria for a successful group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which farmers’ groups have influenced adoption of new practices</td>
<td>Historical role of farmers’ groups</td>
<td>Interviews with key informants</td>
<td>Record-keeping by supporting NGOs</td>
<td>Development of record-keeping system for NGOs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Component 5: Infrastructure built and maintained – Output 5.1 roads extended and maintained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How has the road infrastructure improved as a result of project interventions?</th>
<th>Kilometres of new main roads constructed per year</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Record-keeping from finalisation of construction contracts</th>
<th>Review of road construction programme during annual project review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150 km of main roads and 200 km of secondary roads</td>
<td>Kilometres of secondary roads constructed per year</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Record-keeping from finalisation of construction contracts</td>
<td>Review of road construction programme during annual project review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in driving time between key locations</td>
<td>Level of road use at start of project</td>
<td>Road-use survey: baseline, mid-term, project completion, three years after completion</td>
<td>Design of survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in road use</td>
<td>Level of road use at start of project</td>
<td>Road-use survey: baseline, mid-term, project completion, three years after completion</td>
<td>Design of survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms

Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)

Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)

Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)

Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)

Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information

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Annex D

Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation
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This Annex is useful for:
• M&E staff – to guide project implementers in deciding how to collect and communicate information.
This Annex summarises 34 methods you might find useful for specific M&E tasks. For ease of use, the methods have been grouped in seven categories:

1. Sampling-related methods
2. Core M&E methods
3. Discussion methods (for groups)
4. Methods for spatially-distributed information
5. Methods for time-based patterns of change
6. Methods for analysing linkages and relationships
7. Methods for ranking and prioritising.

Each method is briefly explained in terms of purpose, steps and application tips. As these methods are only brief descriptions from longer texts, please refer to the original texts for additional information (see Further Reading). Note that each method can be adapted and mixed with other methods to suit your needs. See Section 6 for more thoughts on information gathering and management.

You can also create your own methods. For instance, in Zambia, staff of a drinking water project launched an essay contest in different high schools in order to understand youth’s perceptions and assessment of the project. This method ended up providing information that was not being obtained by other means. The essays revealed that, in many cases, children were being asked to help dig wells to satisfy the project’s volunteer labour quota demand. This prevented them from attending school, an effect that was not intended by the project. With this information, staff were able to rethink how to organise project implementation to avoid this negative effect.

Any method can be used in two ways to understand change.

Option 1. It can be applied regularly, as a monitoring sequence, to gain insight into trends. This requires creating a starting point, or “baseline” of data (see Section 5.5). Subsequent applications of the method can be compared to the baseline to identify change and try to understand its causes.

Option 2. It can be used retrospectively to inquire about change in the project area. This option takes the current situation as the starting point and asks people to describe how the situation used to be, for example, three years ago. While it does not make use of an independently assessed baseline it does aim to compare changes over time. Because it relies on people’s memory, this use is only appropriate if you do not need high levels of proven precision for the data.

D.1 Sampling-Related Methods

A census, which is a full count, is often not feasible for gathering data from the entire population that you are interested in studying. The group may be too big or time, resources and funds too limited to carry out a census. In these cases, you need to select a sample that is as representative as possible of the full population in order to make conclusions about characteristics of the whole population. Therefore, some statistical tools are needed to determine how representative your data are, and thus how reliable the information coming out of your study is. How you choose a sample influences the quality of the final results of the M&E study. If your sampling method is biased or your sample too small, then your M&E results will be less reliable and perhaps even invalid.

If you choose sample-based M&E, three factors in particular need to be considered that affect both the methods you choose for the M&E work and the validity of your findings. (More details about such factors can be found in Casley and Kumar (1988) in Further Reading.)
• Clarify your sampling frame. A sampling frame is a description of the set of all possible individuals whom you could choose for your sample. To do this, you must identify a specific unit you wish to study within the population (e.g., all households in a village, certain households in a district or certain plots in a forest) or specify the unit descriptively (e.g., the boundaries of the forest to be studied).

• Decide on an appropriate sample size. The sample size that you choose greatly influences the validity of your findings. Contrary to popular opinion, the optimal size of your sample has little to do with the size of the population you are studying. Rather, it should be determined based on available budget and resources, the number of subgroups to be analysed, the time available and the time needed to carry it out properly, the variation within a population of the variable being tested, the desired level of confidence you would like to have that the estimate is within a given margin of the value for the population, and the maximum allowable error with which you are comfortable. This last point, sampling error, refers to the certainty that your sample represents your population and the likelihood of it not being biased. Although your data do not have to be 100% certain, you do need to make explicit how certain they are in your results. Sample size or error can be calculated through statistical formulas. To calculate an appropriate sample size, check the website of the sample size calculator (http://ebook.stat.ucla.edu/calculators/sampsize.phtml) or see Casley and Kumar (1988) in Further Reading.

• Select your sampling method. With your sample size, you can choose between two main methods for selecting a sample: random sampling and non-random sampling. The choice will depend on the type of information required. Random sampling is usually associated with quantitative data collection and analysis. It gives every individual in a population an equal chance of being selected through random sampling methods. It has more clearly defined selection procedures, uses lists (or equivalent) as its sampling frame and allows for an estimate of sampling error. Non-random sampling is less formal, is most often associated with qualitative data collection and analysis and involves a more focused and deliberate sampling within a population. Both methods carry some risks of bias, although answers may be reliable enough for your purposes. The risk of bias is a main differentiating feature between the two sampling methods. In random sampling, the risk is known and can be minimised as much as you wish – as long as the resources are available. But with non-random sampling, the risk of bias is greater and is more difficult to assess.

Method 1 Random Sampling

**Purpose:**
To produce a sample, without any prior knowledge or consideration of particular characteristics, that can be considered to be representative of the primary stakeholders being affected by a project intervention. From an M&E perspective, the sample is needed to guide the use of information-collection methods.

**How to:**
1. Start by identifying, naming or numbering all the units in a population from which you want a sample (e.g., villages, houses, people, families), so that every unit has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample. This is the act of making a sampling frame.

2. From the sampling frame, choose who will actually be selected for the final sample by using one of two basic random sampling methods.

   • **Simple random sampling** involves selecting at random a group of individuals from a population, like pulling names out of a hat or using a table of random numbers to correspond to specific items on a list. A variation on this method is **systematic sampling**, in which you select a sample at predetermined intervals (for example, every third house) but this is not considered to be a pure random sample as it includes the predetermined element.
Stratified random sampling differs in that the population is first divided into different subgroups (or “strata”), based on particular predetermined characteristics. This could be, for example, age, sex, tribal group in a household survey or a specific geographical feature in an agricultural survey. Then a random sample is selected per stratum, for example, by using a table of random numbers or picking every fifth item or person.

Tips on use:
Random sampling is more often used in larger-scale M&E analyses than non-random sampling (see Method 2). However, random sampling is not always possible or practical if, for instance, there is not enough time to make up a complete list of the information needed. Existing census records, electoral lists, telephone books or other records should be sought out and used whenever possible – but be aware that these may not always be accurate. However, Casley and Kumar (1988) warn against a hasty decision to opt for non-random sampling simply based on resource constraints, as a non-random method may not be useful enough due to the high margin of error. They offer this rule of thumb: “If no list is available and if the creation of a list is limited only by cost constraints (i.e., not by time), it would be worthwhile to sacrifice a quarter to a third of the planned sample size in order to release funds to carry out the listing.”

Nevertheless, random sampling is not useful when dealing with a very small sample size, since it is unlikely to be representative enough and therefore not able to provide accurate conclusions about the whole population. Purposive sampling (see Method 2) can reduce this risk.

Method 2 Non-Random Sampling

Purpose:
To make an explicit choice based on your own judgement about exactly whom to include in your sample. When random sampling is not possible, then you can choose this sampling method for studying how primary stakeholders are affected by a project intervention. You might, alternatively, want a very specific perspective so you purposefully seek certain people or groups. As with Method 1, from an M&E perspective, the sample is needed to guide the use of information-collection methods.

How to:
There are two main non-random sampling methods: purposive sampling (also known as purposeful, convenience or judgmental sampling) and quota sampling.

i. Purposive sampling means selecting a sample based on one or more predetermined characteristics. The aim is to obtain information about those members of the population exhibiting such characteristics. This method is useful for describing a phenomenon rather than in making statistically based inferences about its incidence in the population. For example, you might want to speak only with older people to obtain a historical perspective on agricultural practices in an area, so your purposive sample would aim to create a list of older people on whom to focus your questions. See Box D-2 for an idea on making a listing of such “key informants”.

A variation on purposive sampling is cluster sampling. A small and manageable number of individuals or units are selected from groups or clusters, rather than on an individual basis. For example, first select a certain number of households at random. Then add other households to the sample by going to the nearest houses to those chosen, continuing until the desired sample size is reached.

Box D-1. Example of systematic sampling ¹

A common criticism of rural development projects is that they often concentrate activities in villages with easy access. The design team of an IFAD-supported project in the Ivory Coast aimed to select at least 75% of villages in the project area that should be situated more than 5 km from a paved road. Therefore the team created a sampling frame with units that included villages over the minimum distance of 5 km from a paved road.

¹ IFAD, ANGOC and IIRR 2001, see Further Reading.
Box D-2. Using key informants within purposive sampling

Working with key informants helps when you are seeking in-depth information about a specialized topic (having specific skills, knowledge or roles of interest) in the project area. For instance, this can be used to carry out case studies (Method 10) or focus groups (Method 12).

1. Make a list of potential key informants who can answer the specific M&E question you have in mind. These include:
   - trained experts active in the project area (e.g., doctors, economists, credit experts and agricultural scientists);
   - government officials, such as extension staff or health workers;
   - local leaders, such as tribal chiefs;
   - knowledgeable persons, such as shopkeepers and market traders.

2. Then select the informants most relevant to the question at hand. Add more informants should they come up during the interviews.

ii. Quota sampling is useful for making comparisons and for isolating one particular aspect to be monitored or evaluated. It involves the selection of a fixed and predetermined number of units that possess a particular characteristic, which are then compared to an equal number of units that are similar but lacking in that particular characteristic of interest. For example, for a study on well-being you might want to compare a target group of villages that has strong self-promotional skills with other villages perceived to be weak in such skills. See Box D-3 below.

Box D-3. Quota sampling example

A sample was needed to evaluate the impact on well-being of a project in Burkina-Faso. The programme covered 14 villages that were divided into two groups according to the villages’ perceptions of their own self-promotional abilities:

A. Villages strong in self-promotion: self-sufficiency in household food requirements, a spirit of collective initiative, social cohesion, access to innovations, functional local organisation, etc.

B. Villages weak in self-promotion: absence of human and financial resource mobilisation, tendency to focus on individual interests and work, lack of energy and community consensus (dependency attitude), little openness to innovations and progress, lack of community activities, etc.

Based on this information, all the villages were ranked and the final sample came to a quota of four villages - the two strongest and two weakest villages.

Tips on use:
Non-random sampling is more often used in small-scale monitoring or evaluation exercises and is therefore usually quicker. However, non-random sampling may not adequately represent the range of answers being sought as it involves a predetermined, and therefore potentially biased, source of information. This is because you cannot provide an estimate on sampling error. Of these options, cluster sampling can be cheaper and is easier to implement with minimal training.

D2 Core M&E Methods

This set of eight methods belong to the standard core of methods most often used for measuring changes. These methods are considered so basic to good M&E that you might well find all of them in your project’s information-gathering plan.

Method 3 Stakeholder Analysis

Purpose:
Stakeholder analysis in the context of M&E helps you define whom to try to involve when designing the M&E system and in which way, and it allows you to find out whose information needs must be considered. It can also be used to develop an appropriate sample for data collection (see Methods 1 and 2). This method is useful at different moments during the project:

• It can help you to identify which stakeholders to involve in (re-)designing a project and its M&E system, and to assess their interests and how these relate to the project and to M&E.

• You may want to use it during a specific phase or for a specific project component to analyse stakeholder relations, including cooperation and conflicts and considering external factors affecting stakeholders and their activities. It can assist you in making an appropriate selection of the stakeholders most central to the task/issue at hand.

• It can help provide a foundation and strategy for participation throughout the project, thereby making it easier for stakeholders to learn from each other.

How to:
1. Clarify the main purpose of the stakeholder analysis and agree on the criteria for assessing the stakeholders. As the method described in this annex focuses on using stakeholder analysis for M&E, your main purpose could be “to make sure we are including all key players in developing the project’s M&E system”. You might also want to do a stakeholder analysis for a specific M&E task, for example, participating in the annual project review process. Then your purpose would be “to make sure we are including the key opinions in our annual project review”.

2. Then list which criteria you will use to prioritise whom to involve (see Box D-4). The types of criteria for selecting stakeholders could be: “supposed to be benefiting from the project”, “critical role in ensuring success”, “legally required to participate”, “have specific knowledge on M&E processes”, etc.

Box D-4. Possible criteria for inviting stakeholders to participate in developing the M&E system

• due to their formal role in the project
• because they represent a particular community or an important sub-group of the target population
• because they provide essential skills and/or information to the process
• because they fund the process
• to ensure consistency of policy
• to ensure policy implementation
• because they have legal rights in the project area
• because they have power and/or money
• because they hold a monopoly that is fundamental to ensuring success
• because they invest in local development
• because they are primary residents in the project area

3. List all the people and organisations you can think of that might fit your criteria. The obvious groups of stakeholders likely to be involved in an IFAD-supported project include: key individuals and sub-groups from the target populations, local leaders and key people from implementing partners such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), government staff from various agencies and the local administration, local consultants, local businesses and educational/research institutes. This list needs to be revisited several times as you design the M&E system to ensure that all key groups and people are included and updated. Various methods can be used to identify stakeholders, such as brainstorming (Method 11), interviews with key informants (see Box D-2 and Method 9) or focus groups (Method 12). Cross check the list by asking key people to look critically at the initial list of stakeholders you have produced.

4. Then classify the stakeholders on the basis of the criteria. For this, you will need to make a stakeholder matrix with the stakeholders along one axis and the criteria along the other. Prioritise which stakeholders to involve in developing the M&E system.

5. Finally reach agreement on how best to involve people. This is done by asking the different people/groups themselves how they think they can be optimally involved. Remember that
participation does not mean involving everybody in all decisions at all times. It means thinking carefully about how to ensure that different interests can best be represented in different phases and forums of the M&E process.

**Tips on use:**
Stakeholder analysis is an essential method to use in order to properly design whom to involve in which steps of the M&E process. Such a selection must be done together with different people in order to lessen the risks of having a biased selection. This is a process that continually evolves and must be repeated throughout the life of the project in order to be sure that (new) potentially important stakeholders are not missed.

**Method 4  Documentation Review**

**Purpose:**
To understand the historical evolution and performance of a project/organisation through its documentation, whether in written, electronic, photographic or video form. From an M&E perspective, this method can provide baseline information on a project area or a particular indicator. It also can provide a good background to activities today to help explain whether changes are occurring and why or why not.

**How to:**
1. Make sure you are clear about the questions you wish to answer and what (type of) information you need for this. For example, “What types of income generation have been created?”

2. List all possible sources of existing information (project documentation, government records, organisation reports or geographic document records, university studies, etc.).

3. Prioritise those that are most likely to provide useful information in a cost- and time-efficient manner. This is important, especially in situations where much documentation exists. In such cases, do not try to read everything – focus on the main points.

4. Collect this documentation and check its reliability. Note contradictory evidence. Analyse it in terms of the question you were trying to answer.

5. Identify which information gaps you still have or where contradictory evidence needs to be clarified. Select another collection method, such as questionnaires (Method 8) or interviews (Method 9), to fill that gap.

**Tips on use:**
This may be a good starting point for M&E and can even serve as a substitute for the baseline (see 5.5). Such an initial review of the literature can also help you identify key issues needing to be addressed in a further M&E analysis. However, you are limited by what documentation is available and accessible, how it has been presented and by whom (possibility of biases, etc.), how it has been stored and all of the issues of quality coming from these restrictions. In this way, this method can provide an opportunity to assess an organisation’s or ministry’s internal project information collection and storage system.

**Method 5  Biophysical Measurements**

**Purpose:**
To measure physical changes over time related to any indicator (e.g., health, nutrition, agriculture, credit) using any accepted measurement unit and procedure. From an M&E perspective, this can provide reliable, statistically verifiable data that form an important basis for measuring change and impact.
How to:
1. Start by ensuring you are completely clear about what indicator or piece of data is to be monitored.

2. Agree on what the required degree of accuracy is. If a high level of scientific accuracy is needed, then expertise and an appropriate method must be sought. Counting, weighing or other measurements will depend on skills as well as type of equipment available (e.g., wooden frame, quadrats, tape measures, rulers, scales).

3. The suggested method and how it is used will then need to be adjusted to local conditions, skills and resources. Alternatively, a method can be developed together with primary stakeholders, that is mutually acceptable and is a compromise between a higher level of local appropriateness and decreased scientific accuracy.

4. The data need to be recorded in tables or diagrams, with words or numbers. These can then be used as a framework to follow in order to make comparisons over time.

5. Direct measurements can be an important part of a series of methods as described in this Annex. For example, establishing the range of impacts expected from a project with an impact flow diagram (Method 26) and then selecting a more precise measurement method to monitor a chosen impact.

Box D-5. Examples of specific direct measurement methods

| Health/Nutrition: measuring the upper-arm circumference of children under five, degree of stunting in boys and girls under five, attendance at local clinics, etc. |
| Agriculture: annual yield/production, amount of fencing/terracing constructed, seed or fertilizer expenditures, livestock numbers, number of bore wells constructed, etc. |
| Natural resource management: kilometres of contour bunds, presence of rare species per unit area, survival rate of seedlings planted, etc. |
| Credit: numbers of loans repaid, increasing numbers of savings and credit/self-help groups, etc |

Tips on use:
A simple measurement method that provides good estimates may well be better than a precise, more complex method that is incorrectly applied and leads to wrong data. As indicated above, the degree of accuracy very much depends on the method used. Some methods are more expensive and time-consuming than others. As direct measurement is time consuming, it is critical to be absolutely clear about how you are going to use the information before embarking on a measurement plan.

Method 6  Direct Observation

Purpose:
To obtain useful and timely information by observing what people do, to help make decisions on improving a project's performance or for generating insights and findings that can serve as hypotheses for more focused studies. From an M&E perspective, this method is critical to complement collected data, can be used to understand the context in which information is collected and can help explain results.

How to:
1. Agree on a clear conceptual framework, as well as guidelines for what needs to be observed and the information required.

2. Choose an appropriate observer or group of observers.
   - Community members and project staff who live and work full-time in the project area (e.g., "key informants", see Box D-2). These observers would need to be trained in observational skills.
• People outside the community who have an opportunity to engage in structured observation during field visits. Note that outsiders may need much more time to know what is significant. On the other hand, they sometimes notice significant issues that local people no longer see or take for granted.

3. Collect and record data as agreed. Organise moments in which to discuss the recorded observations, not only with staff from the project and from implementing partners but perhaps also with primary stakeholders.

Box D-6. Example of using direct observation

Direct observation was used to evaluate a drinking water project in Zambia. Training sessions on hygiene undertaken by project staff and attended by women and children in the villages were observed. This study revealed that project staff were using too academic terms and language in the hygiene training, making the sessions useless as they were not understood by villagers. With this information, the training sessions were modified to become more locally appropriate.

Tips on use:
People often forget this simplest of all methods – observation. Everyone observes automatically. But you can make observation more effective by viewing it as a valid method and structuring its use. Much can be learned by watching what people actually do. Useful information and new insights can often be gained from such observation that would otherwise not be obtained. If done well, it can permit a deeper understanding of relationships within communities but also between a community and other organisations. If it is done well, direct observation can help build trust and rapport with local people and project staff. This method is also known as “participant observation” and is a common research method for social issues and processes.

Direct observation is useful for validation in monitoring as it can be used to cross check responses received by other methods.

There is always the danger of introducing information biases due to: biases in the observer, the way the observer influences the observed or the observed situation hampering the objectivity of the observer. These biases can never be eliminated entirely. Therefore, direct observation as a systematic M&E method should only complement other methods. Asking several people to undertake observations in the same manner can help confirm observations or identify differences and so increase the quality of the data.

Method 7 Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

Purpose:
To provide a format (also known as an accounting framework) to enumerate the range of benefits and costs surrounding a decision in order to help weed out costly activities that yield few benefits. From an M&E perspective, a standard use of this method is to evaluate a project by comparing actual final measurements of the costs and benefits against those proposed in the design of the project. Sometimes comparisons can be made with other projects that are delivering similar services and products. Another use is to assess costs and benefits of elements of a project, such as specific activities or indicators.

How to:
1. Enlist the help of a trained economist or expert in CBA, as this method entails the use of various formulas for calculating costs and benefits as well as for discounting, marginal-return analysis and aggregation of the figures.

2. List all the project activities (potential and actual).

3. Calculate all possible project costs over the project period (e.g., labour, use of raw materials, transport). The CBA only includes costs and benefits that you define. So be clear about whether you want to include social and environmental costs and benefits. These will require more effort but will also make the CBA more comprehensive.

4. For each project activity, estimate the benefits, which may continue to occur (well) beyond the project period (e.g., 10 to 30 years). This step is more difficult than Step 3 and will require some research into and help from specific statistical formulas.

Option 1: You are including aggregation in your CBA

a. Aggregate project costs and benefits through the discounting formula, according to the point of interest. This is easiest through a computerised spreadsheet.

b. Calculate annual net benefits by subtracting costs from benefits for each year.

c. Calculate the IRR – interest received on an investment consisting of costs (negative values) and benefits (positive values) – occurring at regular periods (in this case, annually) of the series of annual net benefits. If you are using a spreadsheet programme, it will include IRR as an automatic function.

d. Do a sensitivity analysis by increasing costs and/or benefits by a certain percentage (e.g., 10% or 20%) and check the impact on the IRR. If the IRR is more than the market rate of return even when costs are increased and benefits are decreased, the project is usually considered to be economically robust.

Option 2: You are not including aggregation in your CBA

a. Decide whether to estimate costs and benefits for individual project activities, in order to compare and choose between alternative options.

b. Calculate the (potential) marginal rate of return from each activity option, by estimating the potential costs and benefits associated with alternative options for the same activity.

c. Add the calculations from the previous step to the social, institutional and technical features of the activity option, to permit a more informed choice.

d. Present these findings to key stakeholders for analysis and discussion, to assist in decision making.

Tips on use:
A CBA can be carried out at the design stage of a project to help make decisions on how the project should look and on what activities to include. The various benefits and costs can be monitored over time in order to measure changes.

CBA has several advantages - but only if undertaken properly. It provides a comprehensive framework to link project costs and benefits systematically. It helps project stakeholders think about project details and gives a clear overview of how a project's cash flows work.
However, CBA is also much criticised particularly for making it difficult to account for all potential costs and benefits in a fair and equitable manner. Certain costs and benefits are very difficult to measure, such as intangible, non-financial social and environmental costs (i.e., opportunity costs). For example, how can you adequately measure the potential long-term health and environmental effects of using genetically modified seed varieties within a farming system, or the future price of tomatoes on the world market? Also, the items included in a CBA are biased according to who carries the analysis out, and therefore a CBA's quality and coverage will vary greatly. Furthermore, there is a bias both against unknown future effects and against projects in which benefits occur later in time.

Due to its complexity, CBA is usually carried out only by project designers and economists, without engaging other (primary) stakeholders. It can be made more participatory by including stakeholders in findings analysis. Different options can be presented to allow for a wider discussion on their potential costs and benefits. Participation is more obviously included in Option 1 above.  

The mathematical complexity of the method requires CBA to be undertaken with trained economists and with appropriate computer spreadsheet programmes.

**Method 8 Questionnaires and Surveys**

**Purpose:**
To gain data from a large number of people in a structured way according to specific questions, often in ways that allow for statistical analysis. From an M&E perspective, questionnaires and surveys form the basis of many monitoring and evaluation studies as they allow for focused data collection about specific performance questions or indicators from a sample.

**How to:**
1. Agree on the purpose and information needs of the questions.
2. Decide whether the information needs require a questionnaire or survey format. The terms questionnaire and survey are often used interchangeably but can be distinguished as follows:
   - A questionnaire is a form with questions used to gather information from respondents.
   - A survey is a more general term that might involve a long questionnaire or even one or two simple questions to be answered. It includes surveys where researchers make their own observations, face to face or through telephone interviews or large-scale direct mail efforts.

Questionnaires and surveys can range from being very simple to quite complex. These can follow a very specific and structured set of closed questions (yes/no or multiple choice questions) or they can also include open-ended questions, such as in semi-structured interviews (see Method 9). Fixed-choice or fixed-response questionnaires are good for gathering data that needs to be analysed statistically. Open-ended or free-response questions can be particularly good for determining people’s feelings and attitudes.

3. Ensure that questioning is focused and well formulated or it will not be useful (see Table D-1 below). If necessary, call in appropriate expertise to make sure that the questions have been worded correctly and can be analysed properly. The questions can be formulated to answer a hypothesis that you wish to prove or disprove (e.g., “Does a woman’s level of education affect the health of her children?”) or to find out the extent of a specific problem.

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4 See also Further Reading: IFAD, ANGOC and IIHR 2001, 255-262.
4. Agree on who should be questioned and how many people should be included in the sample (see Methods 1 and 2). Also decide on the most appropriate manner of questioning (a form that is mailed or dropped off to be filled in independently, face-to-face individual interviews, etc.). If interviewing directly, train the interviewers so you can be sure that they understand the purpose and have the skills to ask questions in ways that limit biases.

5. Pre-test the interview questions to ensure that they are appropriate, accurate enough and give you the type of information you need.

6. Collect and analyse the information.

**Tips on use:**
Questionnaires and surveys can provide precise answers to carefully defined questions. The ease of analysing questionnaires and surveys will vary with the number of questions and the size of the sample. Often projects make the sample too big and ask too many questions. Then analysis becomes tedious, takes much time and loses its usefulness if not analysed in time for decision making. Good interviewing skills are important and come through training. If the style is very structured and inflexible, then this may inhibit openness. Long questionnaires and surveys are also tedious for the respondent.

Questionnaires and surveys in which answers must fit a certain set of options or format will also fail to pick up on deviating answers and opinions. So be aware that you might be missing out on important details and variations to the questions.

Questionnaires and surveys can be used with individuals or even used in group situations. However, questions in group situations may need to focus less on private issues (e.g., not on contraceptive practices or financial loans) and more on group opinions (e.g., “What are the advantages and disadvantages of different types of water wells?”). Group-based questionnaires and surveys work best in groups where members are used to working together and can trust each other, as well as the interviewer.

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Table D-1. Examples of closed versus open questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closed Questions</th>
<th>Open and Focused Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you grow enough food to satisfy your family’s needs?</td>
<td>What staple food crops do you grow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have enough food to feed your family today/this week?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many months of the year do you have a shortage of food in the house?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you cover any shortfall in home production?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| How often do you attend the maternal child health clinic with your children? | Do you have children under five years old? |
|                                                                           | How often is the clinic conducted for your village? |
|                                                                           | When was the last clinic visit? What was the purpose of the visit? |
|                                                                           | Did you take your under-five child(ren) to this clinic? Why or why not? |
|                                                                           | What did you think of your visit to the clinic? |

| Have you understood and adopted the recommendations made by the agricultural extension worker in your area? | Have you met the agricultural extension worker? |
|                                                                                                         | What did he/she explain about ways to grow rice? |
|                                                                                                         | What did you think of his/her explanations? Were they clear, useful and relevant? |
|                                                                                                         | Have you tried them? If so, what did you think of them? If not, why not? |
|                                                                                                         | How do you intend to grow rice in the next season? |

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Method 9  Semi-Structured Interviews

**Purpose:**
To gain information face to face from an individual or small group, using a series of broad questions to guide the conversations, but allowing for new questions to arise as a result of the discussion. From an M&E perspective, semi-structured interviews are critical for developing an in-depth understanding of qualitative issues in particular. As the interviews are open-ended (though guided by checklists), they are helpful for assessing, for example, unintended impacts (positive and negative), opinions about the relevance and quality of services and products, etc.

**How to:**
1. Define the purpose and information needs of the inquiry and formulate an interview checklist of open-ended questions. The questions should be such that interviewees can express opinions through discussion. A logical sequence to the questions will help the discussion flow. See Table D-1 in Method 8 for ideas on how to word questions in a useful manner.

2. Agree on who should be interviewed, how many are required within the sample and whether interviews should be with individuals or in a group.

3. Gather and train a team of people to ensure that they understand the purpose and develop the proper skills (how to encourage discussion, taking accurate and useful notes, etc.). Semi-structured interviews are best conducted by two people, with one performing the interview and the other taking detailed notes. But this may not be feasible. You can try tape-recording the interviews, but this can be very inhibiting and transcribing afterwards is extremely time consuming.

4. Pre-test the interview questions to ensure that they are appropriate and accurate enough, and that the answers permit useful analysis.

5. If you conduct group interviews with more than one interviewer, it may be useful to follow the interview with a short internal discussion on the dynamics of the interview, assess the validity of the answers and decide if the interview needs to be adapted.

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6 Gubbels and Koss 2000, 26, see Further Reading.
6. Analyse the information coming from the interviews. See Box D-7 for tips on how to structure open-ended information for easy analysis.

Box D-7. How to synthesise and analyse open-response information from semi-structured interviews (or other methods)

a) Produce a short summary of what each person says, including the main points.
b) Look over the responses. Once you have looked at about 25%, note the points most frequently mentioned. Then read all the responses and record how many interviewees have responded to each of these main points. Alternatively, divide the responses into those “for” or “against” a certain issue or divide them to show various degrees of enthusiasm about an issue.
c) Take out any important quotes to emphasise certain points.
d) Ask other people also to look through the responses to prevent your own biases taking over the way you interpret responses.
e) Number each respondent.
f) Following the list of points you developed in step b above, number the main points. Through this numbered coding system, prioritise, summarise and then analyse the information.

Tips on use:
Semi-structured interviews can easily be used in combination with another method. For example, you might be walking a transect (Method 18) with farmers with whom you are having a semi-structured interview. Many of the visual group methods work best if conducted as a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews can be a relaxed way to obtain insights not possible from structured questionnaires. Interesting, unforeseen topics may also emerge in this manner. However, such information may not be sufficiently precise to allow for statistically analysis. For this, use a questionnaire (see Method 8).

Open-ended information is also more difficult and time-consuming to synthesise well enough to obtain clear results. It can be difficult to keep interviews focused, making different interviews difficult to compare properly. Accurate note-taking is particularly important to make interpretation possible. Take the time and money to train people to conduct a semi-structured interview. Training needs to address team preparation, interview context, sensitive listening, sensitive questioning, judging responses, recording the interview and self-critical review.

Group interviews require more attention to details, such as using simple language and avoiding technical jargon or expressions to be certain that the least informed person in the group understands the questions. Consider beforehand what might be politically or culturally sensitive as controversial issues can raise strong emotions leading to conflicts within the group.

Method 10 Case Studies

Purpose:
To document the life story or sequence of events over time related to a person, location, household or organisation in order to obtain insight into a project’s impact – for example, how people deal with change and why change occurs in specific ways – and to learn about people’s experiences, dreams and obstacles for future planning. From an M&E perspective, case studies add life to what might otherwise be data without a human face and they allow for an in-depth understanding of the context and human factors behind general or summarised data that may be collected through other means.

How to:
1. Define the purpose and precise information needs of the case study.
2. Decide how you are going to select the individuals, households or organisations about which you will do the case studies. Other methods can help with this, for example, social mapping (see Method 31 below) to find an appropriate selection of case study households.
3. Decide how you will obtain the information. If you are doing a household case study, you might wish to interview several household members and then form one study of their answers, in which you highlight similarities and differences. If you want to write a case study of an organisation, think which people you will need to interview to obtain a good overview. If you are developing a case study of a location, then you might need not only to interview people but also gather additional biophysical information.

4. Develop the question checklist that will guide the information collection. Case studies involve a written (or filmed, see Method 20 below) account of observations and answers. Attention must be paid to choosing a good interviewer/recorder, whether a person external to or within the community. In more participatory processes, the study is carried out by (a group of) individuals on themselves or each other, and perhaps with a control group for comparison.

5. Repeat the discussions with enough frequency to allow an up-to-date picture of changing conditions. The frequency will depend on the rate of change of the issues in which you are interested. Aspects that change quickly might need more frequent follow-up than issues with slow rates of change.

Tips on use:
The strength of this method is that you obtain much detail on a specific topic. The need for a focused case study can arise from a general survey in which a particular issue emerges as needing more in-depth elaboration. Case studies can provide interesting perspectives that you can only gain through a closer look at the overall situation (or life story) of a person, household, etc.

Case studies can provide much important background and human context for data that are generated by other methods. A cross-case study analysis can be highly valuable, particularly if it relates to broader policy questions of major interest. A case study is particularly useful in complex situations where many variables interrelate and where outcomes and impact are liable to vary across different populations.

However, case studies are generally not considered representative. For this reason, it is good to use case studies in combination with methods involving larger samples, such as surveys or questionnaires.

A variation on this method is to use the traditional form of story-telling as an entertaining way to gain some understanding of how people deal with issues or crises. It is often an important part of village life in communicating ideas and community values. However, since a story is often a metaphor and open-ended, it needs careful thought to be useful. As with other methods, the information must be carefully recorded.

Box D-8 provides one example from a booklet of case studies of various primary stakeholders participating in a project in Ghana. Offset by colourful photographs, these case studies were able to provide an attractive way of bringing human detail to an interim evaluation report.
Box D-8. Example of a short case study used to profile primary stakeholders in the Ghanaian Rural Enterprises Project's Interim Evaluation (2000)

Profile on Hilda Ayensu - A client who has added another enterprise to an existing one

Hilda was born in 1966 in the Volta Region of Ghana. She was the seventh out of eight children. Her father was in the Ghana police service, which meant they were transferred several times, allowing Hilda to pick up several Ghanaian languages.

When she married, her husband encouraged her to take a vocational course, and she decided to study dress-making. After a three-year course, she set up a workshop, her elder sister giving her the initial capital for the enterprise. She has already trained five apprentices.

Between April and August, however, dress-making is not a profitable business and Hilda found it difficult to manage the house financially. She decided to participate in the Rural Enterprises Project's one-week course in making soap and pomade. With the financial assistance of her husband, together with her own savings, she started a soap-making business.

Hilda makes a profit margin of GHC 200,000 (USD 1 = 7100GHC in Sept. 2001) per week and, from the profit, has been able to construct a big shed where she makes the soap. Her husband, a trader in food and household goods, has decided to stop his trading activity and concentrate on soap production. Hilda believes that the project should organise an advanced course for them to improve upon their skills instead of solely training new members who will saturate the market.

D3 Discussion Methods for Groups

Much M&E, particularly in participatory projects, can be undertaken with group-based discussions. Six basic methods to encourage discussion are presented below but there are many more. For example, many of the methods in sections D4 to D7 are also excellent for group contexts.

Don’t forget the obvious discussion techniques. One of the most common ways to encourage discussion and organise ideas is with cards. You can use cards when you are brainstorming (see Method 11), working in focus groups (Method 12) or as part of other methods, such as SWOT (Method 14). After being clear about the question or topic, ask participants, either individually or in small groups of three or four, to write each idea or piece of information on one card (“one idea, one card”). The cards are pinned to the board or spread on the ground. First remove all duplicates. The group then clusters the remaining cards together into core themes. Discussion can now focus on each cluster.

Method 11 Brainstorming

**Purpose:**
To gain many ideas quickly from a group without becoming caught up in detailed discussion. It encourages people to think critically and creatively, rather than simply generating a list of options, answers or interests. From an M&E perspective, this method is often a first step in a discussion that is then followed by other methods. For example, brainstorming is useful when starting a matrix scoring exercise (see Method 32), an impact flow diagram (Method 26) or when starting to develop a stakeholder analysis (Method 3).

**How to:**
1. Begin by asking the group to think of as many ideas as they can about the topic in question. You can give them several minutes for this.
2. Go around the group asking each person to briefly state his/her idea. The ideas can be captured using rich pictures (Method 25) or nominal group technique (Method 13), using symbols or words. Everybody’s ideas should be treated equally at this stage. Do not let people start debating each other’s ideas.
3. Once all of the ideas have been noted somewhere visible to everyone (e.g., on a flip chart or chalkboard), then there can be some analysis.

4. The emerging issues, topics and questions can later be grouped, sorted and prioritised.

**Tips on use:**

Note that this method does not, on its own, suffice as a data gathering or analysis method.

The method can work with small or larger groups and can take as little as five minutes, depending on the subject, detail needed and number of people. A brainstorming session should not take very long, as it really is only meant to get out ideas that can be discussed in detail later.

People find it very difficult not to comment or evaluate when ideas are generated in a brainstorm. Set a rule at the beginning that all judgements made during the brainstorm will be ruled out until a later discussion. As with most group discussion methods, some participants may dominate. To avoid this problem, you can distribute cards to all individuals on which they brainstorm their thoughts or ask them to brainstorm in sub-groups (also see nominal group technique, Method 13).

This method is commonly used in combination with other methods, for example, to start a focus group session (Method 12).

**Method 12 Focus Groups**

**Purpose:**

To use group discussion to collect general information, clarify details or gather opinions about an issue from a small group of selected people who represent different viewpoints. It can also be used to build consensus. For M&E, focus groups are good for assessing opinions of change, assessing the quality of project services or service providers, and identifying areas of improvement.

**How to:**

1. Determine the participants (four to eight people is ideal). Depending on your purpose, you can work with a homogenous or heterogeneous group. Alternatively, use a number of focus groups, each one fairly homogeneous, but the groups being different from each other. This enables interesting comparisons.

2. Present the group with a broad question (e.g., "What impact do you think a particular intervention has had in achieving sustainable land use?").

3. Discuss this question for the time period agreed upon beforehand, one or two hours maximum. There should be minimal intervention by the facilitator other than to make sure that everybody has a say. Perhaps you might need to repeat the question using different words from time to time or to probe if something is not clear.

4. Take detailed notes of the discussion. Focus groups are best if facilitated in pairs - one person to facilitate the discussion and the other for note-taking. You can also record the discussion but this will have the usual problems of time-consuming transcription and inhibiting the group.

5. One way to be sure that the information collected is reliable is to keep conducting different focus group sessions until the data becomes repetitious.

**Tips on use:**

If facilitated well, this method can bring out detailed information. It generally stimulates rich responses and also provides a valuable opportunity to observe discussions and to gain insights into behaviours, attitudes, language and feelings.
However, facilitation of a focus group requires considerable skill – both in moderating the group and in adequately recording the responses. Group dynamics, due to individuals being too shy, dominating, disruptive, etc. can hamper the discussion.

This method can be used to obtain a consensus view. However, a small group of people cannot represent all views held by, for example, an organisation or community. On the other hand, if the group is not homogeneous enough, there can be great disagreement. So think carefully about the composition of the group.

This method can generate focused insights more quickly and generally more cheaply than through a series of key informants or formal social surveys.

Method 13 Nominal Group Technique (Simple Ranking)

**Purpose:**
To generate ideas and to enable a group to come to consensus in developing a ranked list of problems, issues or actions. A variant on this method is to encourage people to generate possible solutions to a given problem. From an M&E perspective, like brainstorming (Method 11), it supports other methods. It can help, for example, to generate a list of priority performance questions or indicators, to prioritise stakeholders during a stakeholder analysis (Method 3) and to follow up on impact flow diagrams to prioritise impacts (Method 26).

**How to:**
1. Develop a list of the problems, issues or actions that need to be ranked. Express each as clearly as possible to avoid confusion.

2. Each person independently ranks the statements onto a set of cards according to his/her view of the priorities. The highest number (if there are six statements the highest number will be six) can be given to their highest ranked statement and the next highest number to their next highest priority and so on through the list.

3. The cards of rankings are then gathered and tallied on the master sheet.

4. The total scores for each statement will enable them to be put in order of importance.

**Variation**
- V1. Every member of the group writes his/her ideas down as a word or phrase and then shares them one by one with the group.
- V2. Each idea is labelled with a symbol or letter to make ranking of solutions easier. Try to discourage discussion up until this point so that shyer members can also contribute.
- V3. Once all of the ideas are up on the board or flipchart, clarify, discuss and rank them as per the steps 1-4 above.

**Tips on use:**
This method can be used with small or large groups and can take from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the group and how much debate there is over the initial statements.

The final outcome is a set of independent judgements made in a non-threatening, private way that will allow people to generate a group judgement without social pressure to conform.

Nominal groups (groups “in name only”) brings people together in a way that generates ideas more effectively and creatively than when people interact to discuss, brainstorm, and exchange information.
Method 14 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

**Purpose:**
To identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to a project or group, and how such an assessment will change over time. From an M&E perspective, this method is useful when qualitatively assessing, for example, the services provided by the project, relationships between project stakeholders and the organisations of the implementing partners, local groups and the project team itself.

**How to:**
1. Referring to Box D-9, the group defines, discusses and records as many factors as possible for each heading. Emphasise that strengths and weaknesses refer to internal aspects of the group, project site or activity. Opportunities and threats can be looked at in terms of internal or external factors affecting them.

2. Alternatively, different sub-groups, for example during a workshop or in a community, can undertake a SWOT on their own. Comparing the different SWOTs can lead to a good discussion about the differences and similarities of experiences and possibilities.

3. Based on this overview, discuss what actions are needed (see Box D-10).

**Box D-9. What are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?**

| Strengths | Those things that are working well in a project or situation. The aspects people are proud to talk about. |
| Weaknesses | Those things that have not worked so well. |
| Opportunities | Ideas on how to overcome weaknesses and build on strengths. |
| Threats | The things that constrain or threaten the range of opportunities for change. |

**Box D-10. SWOT window showing analysis of a mangrove reforestation project, with a resultant list of actions below**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a youth group that is willing to work on the replanting.</td>
<td>We do not know how to do the transplantation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rico has plenty of bamboo off-cuts that could be used as stakes.</td>
<td>We have no money for the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most community members are more interested in their own activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We do not need to buy propagules because we can collect them for free.</td>
<td>Fish-pond operators want to clear more of the mangroves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have the abandoned fish pond, which we could use for the project.</td>
<td>Some community members cut mangroves for firewood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university has people who know about mangrove reforestation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An NGO is providing livelihood assistance in the area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**List of Actions**
- Contact the university to ask assistance in training and environmental education.
- Discuss the problem about the fish pond owner with the mayor.
- Hold a meeting with the youth group and other members of the community.
- Design an incentive scheme for those who would be planting and maintaining the plantation.
- Link with NGOs for possible assistance in livelihood programme.

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Tips on use
SWOT is an adaptable and flexible method, allowing for different perceptions to be recorded, and it directs the attention of those involved towards joint action.

This method is useful to encourage input from many people, helping them think about potential solutions and constraints, for example, as part of a strategic planning process. SWOT can take past mistakes or weaknesses and transform them into constructive learning processes. It can help make complex problems easier to deal with within the shortest time possible. It is a useful starting point for group self-evaluation.

A SWOT analysis can be done as a brainstorm in a small group or workshop setting or it can be done as an analysis and synthesis of other information.

Method 15 Dreams Realised or Visioning

Purpose:
To have a focused discussion around people’s dreams or shared visions for the future of a project or other activity. From an M&E perspective, this is a good method for identifying indicators, understanding if primary stakeholders feel that their well-being is increasing or not, and helping project stakeholders reflect on the relevance of activities based on people’s visions for development.

How to:
1. Start by asking people to describe how they would like things to be in the future. The meetings can be held at an individual, household, interest group, community, or organisation level. The future time for which dreams are to be discussed will need to be clarified beforehand but a period of two to five years is long enough for dreams to be more than simply dealing with the immediacy of survival and yet short enough to remain realistic.

In practical terms, it consists of two basic steps: (1) personal reflection (15 minutes) and (2) sharing in sub-groups and/or directly in plenary until a single common future is created from the individual reflections (up to 90 minutes, depending on if there is a sub-group session first). There is usually one guiding question that works effectively at both individual and group levels, for example:

“What are the characteristics of the ideal situation we wish to achieve here in 20 years time?”

Or ask them to complete the sentence:

“I know that my vision for this situation has been achieved when I see…”

It is also possible to generate a discussion by asking people to imagine they are giving a presentation at a conference or to their community at some point in the future (e.g., in two years time), describing why their project has been successful. What would they present as the successfully achieved future? First ask them to list the stakeholders who should give their views at this meeting. Divide them into small groups, each one representing a different stakeholder from the area where the project has been active, for instance, the government agency, the local resource user, the village children and the funding agency. This will stimulate a more comprehensive idea of the vision than if they only think in terms of being a project staff member or partner.

2. The dreams can be written down or represented with a symbol. In the discussion, the dreams can be specified, with clear time frames for achievement.

3. Once articulated and discussed, the dreams can become the indicators that are being monitored as they are being realised, are changing or are becoming ever more elusive.

4. The discussion is repeated every six to 12 months, or however often those involved think changes are likely to have occurred. The progression or regression of the development of the dreams/indications should be monitored.
tors needs to be properly recorded in symbols or words in these discussions (for example, see Figure D-1 below). Discussions can also include a comparison of current dreams with those articulated during a prior monitoring event. It is essential also to discuss why these changes occurred and to what extent they were caused by project activities or by other, external factors.

Tips on use:
This method helps people think in terms of a longer-term vision, beyond the immediacy of daily problems. It provides a good basis for planning as it builds on people’s own dreams. Working from a vision helps to open up people’s minds to other ways of overcoming problems. Focusing only on problem-solving often restricts people’s ideas as they often slip into standard ways of solving the immediate problem in front of them, rather than imagining a new path they can create towards realising the envisaged future.

This method requires good facilitation in order to find convergence between the variety of dreams that may emerge from different people/groups.

Note that the longer the time frame you choose for this visioning exercise, the more it will become dreamlike or a kind of a wish-list. If a time frame of five years is used for this exercise, then the vision is more likely to resemble an achievable output. Neither one nor the other is better – it is important to have the long-term vision and be fairly realistic about it.

Method 16 Drama and Role Plays

Purpose:
To encourage groups of people to enact scenes from their lives concerning perceptions, issues and problems that have emerged relating to a project intervention, which can then be discussed. Drama can also help a group to identify what indicators would be useful for monitoring or evaluating and to identify changes emerging from a project intervention.

How to:
1. Choose the central theme, whether it be an M&E indicator or a question or scenario that is to be dramatised.

2. Decide who is to work together on a drama piece. If you want to compare different perspectives, then discuss with the group how best to form sub-groups to allow these perspectives to emerge. For example, elderly women, younger women, elderly men, younger men, girls and boys could each present their views of the changes in the community resulting from rehabilitation of the local school.

3. Participants construct their own dramatic performances, in which they present their opinions and thoughts on the topic being discussed.

4. The facilitator(s) can record the performances through written, photographed and/or video-taped documentation.

5. The group then discusses the issues emerging from the play and conclusions can be drawn.

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Figure D-1. A woman’s progress towards realising her ideal future, India

Tips on use:
This method helps people think in terms of a longer-term vision, beyond the immediacy of daily problems. It provides a good basis for planning as it builds on people’s own dreams. Working from a vision helps to open up people’s minds to other ways of overcoming problems. Focusing only on problem-solving often restricts people’s ideas as they often slip into standard ways of solving the immediate problem in front of them, rather than imagining a new path they can create towards realising the envisaged future.

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5. The group then discusses the issues emerging from the play and conclusions can be drawn.

---

Notes:
Tips on use:
Sometimes information can be drawn from drama or role plays in a cutting and satirical way, revealing things that would not come out through more formal methods. This method is an interesting way to monitor group interactions and perceptions of key problems. It can also be used to monitor, in a very qualitative manner, changes in natural resource use, for example, by asking those involved to include their use of resources, the quality and ease of availability, etc. in the scene they are to enact. Drama can be a good way to start identifying what changes might be most important to monitor using other methods.

Some cultures are entirely at ease with drama as a form of communication but for others, it is uncomfortable. Do consider the cultural appropriateness of this method. Also, it is highly qualitative and so would not be suited for precise information needs.

D4 Methods for Spatially-Distributed Information

The methods in this section deal with information about any issue that has some level of geographic distribution. This could be land and land uses but also health, education or economic issues. Maps relate to a geographic area, and can therefore help locate biophysical, economic and social indicators that have a geographic distribution. They can be used to focus on all levels - from a farm property, to the community-level of households, to a larger region. Maps can be made from the most rudimentary materials such as a stick to draw on sand, to the most precisely accurate high-tech images that get coordinates through the use of a GPS (global positioning system, see Box D-11). Maps can represent perceptions, be based on memory or be produced with cameras or a computer programme such as with a GIS (geographic information system). Existing aerial photos and formal maps can also be used if they are at the desired scale and are understandable to those involved.

Box D-11. Global positioning systems

A global positioning system is increasingly affordable and not difficult to use for making highly accurate maps. GPSs are hand-held devices that use signals from a network of satellites to automatically calculate precise data on geographic coordinates. The receiver references its position with respect to these satellites, thereby giving an accurate measurement of the exact geographic coordinates. Researchers and stakeholders alike can use the GPS receivers to determine these coordinates. To make simple maps based on GPS can be done by anyone, but to make highly detailed and accurate maps such as those using the GIS format (Method 19) requires training and additional computer equipment.

Method 17 (Sketch) Mapping

Purpose:
To provide a visual representation of information in a particular geographical context based on stakeholders’ perceptions of any focus issue or indicator that is being monitored and evaluated:

- physical, such as available resources and their use, key problem areas, (proposed) innovations, where land degradation problems are and where improvements have been noticed, or regarding a specific topic like maize trials;
- social, ownership- or gender-differentiated use of natural resources, etc.

How to:
1. Ask the individual or the group to draw the boundaries of the geographic unit being discussed. Participants can decide how they want to represent this - on paper with writing or using local materials such as sticks, stones or seeds. Remember that whatever material is chosen, you will always need a paper-based copy to enable comparative analysis.
If it adds to the discussion, three-dimensional elements can be added, transforming the map into a model that emphasises landscape-level aspects of issues.

2. On whatever medium is chosen, ask the participants to draw the outline of the local area, for example, roads, towns, rivers and property boundaries. One way to do this, if you have the proper resources, is to project an overhead map onto a large sheet of paper and then to trace the required information.

3. Having prepared the map, which could be as large as a wall, people can then add their information either directly or by using sticky notes. Let them record what is most significant to them, and then ask for more detail if something you are interested in is missing. One use of a sketch map is for social mapping of household levels of well-being (see Method 31).

4. Several modifications to the map may be needed before those involved are happy with the final result. Include additional written comments such as quantities of interest, if necessary.

5. Once a “base” map has been made, subsequent meetings can use it to make comparisons. Figure D-2 below shows such a comparison of a base map with a later monitoring event, recording the status of fields before and after soil and water conservation measures were taken in one project in India. To be most effective, at least some of the people involved in the map production should be involved in updating the map during the next monitoring event.

Alternatively, the same map can be used by colour-coding indicators for each new year or monitoring event. While this option is much easier for direct comparison and analysis (as all the data are recorded on one map), it can become messy if too many indicators and years of data are stored on it.

Tips on use

Remember that only those issues that have a geographic distribution are useful to analyse with maps. Maps are useful for obtaining a better understanding of an area being studied, and for providing information and ideas on local perspectives of, for example, resources or access to services/facilities.

The larger the number of topics to be included, the more complex the maps will be. For this reason, it might be better to make several maps, with one issue/indicator per map. However, this is very time-consuming and storing such maps can pose difficulties.

Sketch maps represent how people see a physical area or a particular issue and its importance, and are, therefore, not as precise or scale-accurate as formal maps. Also, people will only show on a map what is of value to them. So, for example, where a mining company’s map of an area would emphasise the locations of ore deposits and navigable rivers, the local map of the same area but drawn by villagers may show communal areas, sacred places, pasture lands, burial grounds and agricultural lands.
Figure D-2. Status of fields before and after soil and water conservation measures, India

Method 18 Transects

**Purpose:**
To undertake a structured walk through an area to observe particular indicators (such as the incidence of weeds or soil erosion, variations in quality and quantity of natural resources or the use of innovations in different zones).

**How to:**
1. Based on the topics or indicators to be observed, decide who could provide relevant and varied information for participating in the transect or who might be interested in participating. Different stakeholders should be involved, such as local primary stakeholders, community leaders, farmers and also those holding relevant expertise, extension agents, etc. If the group is too large, thought should be given on how to divide the group to participate in separate walks along the same route.

2. If a map of the area is available, use it to decide together what the route will be. The same route should be taken each time to keep the basis of observing changes stable. Transect routes can vary greatly in time needed – from one hour to a whole day, depending on the size of the area, the type of transport and the detail needed.

3. Indicators that people want to observe, measure, record and analyse will already have been identified and these form the basis of observations and measurements during the walk.

4. As the walk proceeds, participants can use their curiosity to probe for and include other unexpected observations. Indicators do not have to be visual but can also include topics such as land ownership or which solutions have been tried where for which problems. Keep a good record of what emerges from the discussions.

5. Draw what has been seen and discussed on a schematic diagram and use that as the basis for subsequent monitoring transect walks.

6. The frequency of walks will vary considerably, depending on the indicator(s) that are being monitored and the rate with which the monitored changes are likely to change. If monitoring pests, this might require a daily walk, whereas monitoring soil erosion would perhaps require a walk every four to six months.

7. Comparing the different observations for each zone serves as the basis for discussing why changes might have occurred. You can walk with any notes or diagrams from previous monitoring events to trigger your memory and to make immediate comparisons possible.

**Tips on use:**
This is a relatively inexpensive method that provides many valuable insights. It can be used for quantitative and qualitative information gathering.

The drawing of a transect walk is usually a cross-sectional view of the path taken, with the findings below it in table format. However, if this is too abstract, then it might be more useful simply to draw the walk as a bird’s eye view line on a map, with the related information written alongside.
Method 19 GIS Mapping

**Purpose:**
To use a computer-based geographic information system (GIS) that represents geographic coordinates in a very precise map, to include information relating to changes in geographical, social or agricultural indicators. From an M&E perspective, a GIS can help to analyse complex data collected through other methods, as the various thematic layers of spatial information (such as forest distribution, population densities or even community planning activities) can be overlaid for easy examination of relationships between the different themes. GIS can present some M&E data with great precision.

**How to:**
1. Decide if you need a high level of precision. This may only be needed for some aspects of large-scale and highly complex M&E studies. Obtaining GIS base maps can be very costly so for most projects will not usually be worth the investment.
2. Obtain images from the area to be studied in order to have a base map. Increasingly, base maps in GIS format are available from government and other agencies. If these are not available, you must think carefully about the time and resources you will need to invest into converting maps into a GIS format, or to creating your own base map.
3. Having determined the indicators to be monitored using other methods, collect data on these indicators. Create a numerical coding system to represent qualitative information as the GIS format only recognises data as numbers.
4. Organise the information using GIS software programmes (e.g. MAPINFO, ARCVIEW, IDRISI, etc.). A GPS (see Box D-11) can be used to assist in producing a highly accurate map.
5. Present the images to the community for their input and feedback.
6. Periodically, repeat the process and mount the maps for easy comparison. Discuss what changes can be seen, why these might have occurred and what might happen next with or without appropriate action. New discussions are held for each new set of images.

**Tips on use:**
A GIS can help you collate, analyse and present information. Using GIS technology can generate maps representing a diversity of themes, able to combine quantitative and qualitative information. It can be a powerful communication mechanism for advocacy. It can also be useful for making simulations of possible designs.

However, GIS technology has been criticised for its quantitative, systematic, expert-centred and high-tech approach, which distances stakeholders from the whole research and decision-making process. Nevertheless, if it is well organised, GIS use can be made more participatory by including stakeholders in the process of obtaining data, by presenting the images for their feedback and discussion, and to help stakeholders make their own management decisions. Various participatory methods (e.g., discussion or mapping methods) can be used to obtain these data.

Even if a GIS is used in a participatory process, there can be a loss of detail when attempting to enter descriptive information into a GIS programme. A GIS cannot always adequately represent qualitative information such as social, economic and environmental explanations of a problem obtained at the village level.

This is a technical, expensive method that requires some training. These techniques should only be used if the project can justify the cost and has the expertise to use the required technology.
Method 20 Photographs and Video

Purpose:
To help track changes discerned from a series of photographs or video sequences shot at different levels (from using a normal camera at ground-level to aerial or satellite photographs taken from an airplane or from space). From an M&E perspective, this method can focus on specific indicators or performance questions or can be more open-ended if you give the camera to stakeholders and ask them to assess changes they perceive to be critical.

How to
1. Obtain a series of images from different years, including the current situation. Many government agencies will have photographs on file that can be a good source of historical land-use data.

Box D-12. Some hints for making a photo series to assess change(some are relevant for a video series as well) 12

- Have a consistent landmark in the background of the photo year-after-year. A post, rock, painted X, telephone pole or some other object that will stay in place over time.
- Fancy equipment is not necessary. You can use a 35 mm camera, but even a cheap disposable camera will do.
- Write down when the photo was taken and make sure you are standing in the same location each time.
- Take the photo at the same time of year each time, to make comparisons easier.
- Target the area of focus – do not try to photograph too large an area.
- Use old photos to compare (historical photos, if available)

2. After deciding what indicators to monitor, the person or group takes photographs or video footage focusing on images that will show the selected indicator(s).

3. Having obtained the images needed, discuss them with the people whose perspectives are important to understand. Types of issues to discuss could include: what are the key changes, how widespread are they, what different views on change are there or what are the causes of the changes that have been filmed or photographed.

4. Return to the same site and take a new set of photos or video footage at key moments, such as for reporting periods, at times of seasonal change, just after germination or prior to harvesting.

5. Place the different sets of images side by side (or edit the videos to show changes sequentially) and trigger a discussion on any differences that can be seen, why these might have occurred, what might happen as a result, what actions will be needed, etc. These analytical discussions are repeated for each new sequence.

6. Be sure to label and store the photographs/video footage properly in a safe and accessible place, in a manner that will allow for easy comparison with the next sequence of images.

Tips on use:
Photographs and videos can be combined with a range of other methods, such as diaries (Method 21) or the “most significant change” method (Method 24). They can also enhance the use of drama and role plays (Method 16). Such images can also be used to look at differences between before and after an intervention, something particularly helpful when disseminating information or providing presentations.

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D.5 Methods for Time-Based Patterns of Change

Time-based methods refer to those methods that help to understand changes related to specific blocks of time, for example, how the month of September compares between one year and the next, how March compares to August, how a typical day today compares to a typical day two years ago or simply which critical events have occurred over the past 20 years. This should not be confused with the fact that all methods can be repeated in order to monitor changing situations through making comparisons against a particular starting point or baseline.

Method 21 Diaries

Purpose:
To record events, facts, reactions and/or opinions over time, as recorded by individual stakeholders or by groups. From an M&E perspective, this method is useful for capturing details that might otherwise be missed and that might explain the context in which a change occurred. The method also may enhance understanding of how a change came about. It can be used to focus around specific performance questions or indicators.

How to:
1. Introduce the diary early on in the life of the project, in order to optimise the learning process.

2. The form and focus of the diary needs to be decided and someone to record the entries must be chosen. Diaries can be more or less structured, and are not necessarily based on pre-determined indicators but can describe general themes. They can be very focused, for example, dealing only with a specific crop variety, or they can describe broader developments.

3. Entries can be written documentation, video-taped sequences, photographs or tape recordings. Diagrams can also be included but this can be quite time-consuming. The diaries can be written based on group discussions, for example, as annexes to the minutes of a meeting. Alternatively, they can be written by individual stakeholders.

4. Diaries can then be used in discussions by having individuals or groups meet to compare notes and identify changes that are particularly significant and require action.

5. Data gathering and analysis and the sharing of findings may require other methods, such as measurement, focused group discussions and compilations of recordings/photographs/video shots. A diary will remain with the recorders who may compare how performance has changed over time and discuss the reasons for this shift.

Tips on use:
One type of diary has been termed “process documentation”, for which entries are written during the life of a project with detailed descriptions of processes, why events happened, problems and people’s reactions, etc. Another good alternative is the learning diary, used by individuals or groups in their internal evaluation system to assess what they are learning, how they are reaching conclusions, and if it is useful.

Diaries are accessible, as people/groups can decide themselves when they will monitor and how. It is therefore good for self-evaluation. Diaries can provide detailed, qualitative insights but literacy is critical as is the discipline to write regular entries. Analysing the content of diaries requires focused, selective reading of passages. Therefore, it is useful to decide beforehand what types of entries will be made.
Method 22 Historical Trends and Timelines

Purpose:
To obtain a historical understanding of sequential changes that have occurred, relating to particular points of interest. From an M&E perspective, this could focus on specific indicators, be used as triggers in discussions to assess if certain changes can be attributed to project activities, and list changes in the context that help explain possible effects of the project.

How to:
There are three ways to record discussions that focus on historical data - in written form, as a matrix or as a graph. To develop a matrix summarising historical trends:

1. Agree on what indicators/events are important to the situation at hand.

2. On a large sheet of paper draw rows and columns to make a matrix. List dates going along the top, for example, write at the head of three columns: “Today”, “10 Years Ago” and “20 Years Ago” (see Box D-13 below).

3. Write in the topics of interest along the side - such as key local events, key external events, influence of local personalities/groups, major changes (social, environmental, economic) and key trends - as pertaining to the agreed performance questions or indicators or simply to understand specific aspects of the context in which change happened.

4. Work either with a representative group of people or with different, more homogenous groups to fill in the table, using seeds, stones, numbers, etc. The discussion focuses on how people view changes with respect to the issues listed. The quantities indicated are not absolute numbers but are a relative comparison of how the aspect has changed from one time period to the next.

5. You can add a fourth column - “the future” - in which people identify what they would like to see change and what targets they have related to the aspects being discussed. The changes recorded can then be sorted into positive, neutral or negative events, depending on their impact on the organisation or community.

Tips on use:
Historical trend lines show changes from one year to the next and, therefore, provide a good means of tracking longer-term changes. This method can stimulate a valuable discussion about the speed and extent of positive and negative changes, why a situation is as it is and why different groups or individuals hold the views they do. This method provides a human dimension to data.

However, it only provides general insights and details will need validation.

Historical trends/timelines differ from seasonal calendars (Method 23) in that they show a sequence of activities or progressive change, while seasonal calendars illustrate cyclical changes.
Box D-13. Historical trend analysis of renewable natural resources

Ask participants to list all the natural resources used by the community to support local livelihoods. Once they have been placed along the vertical axis of a matrix, ask them to use ten seeds or stones and determine which time period enjoyed the healthiest natural resource base (in terms of its abundance and/or quality). This must be done for every period (using up to ten seeds each time). See the matrix below for a hypothetical example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Today</th>
<th>10 Years Ago</th>
<th>20 Years Ago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop production</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil fertility</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water for animals</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture land</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass for roofing</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit trees</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees for fencing</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method 23 Seasonal Calendars

**Purpose:**
To explore and record data for distinct time periods (per season, year, month or even week) to show cyclical changes over time. From an M&E perspective, calendars can help, for example, to assess if bottlenecks that occurred regularly are being resolved or not, whether these are attributable to the project and when certain performance questions or indicators are best monitored or evaluated.

**How to:**
1. It is important to clarify with those involved whether calendars will monitor changes between weeks, months, seasons, or years. This will depend on the indicators that have been selected and the rate at which they change.

2. Construct the calendar either to depict one or several years, or the minimum number of months or seasons over which monitoring is intended to occur. The calendar can be represented either horizontally or as a circle, though the latter can become messy to read if many indicators are being monitored. Circular calendars are not suited for multi-year trend analysis.

3. The calendar itself can be used to gather the data in some cases. For example, at weekly or monthly staff meetings, when the tasks completed in the past month are discussed, these can be recorded immediately onto the calendar. Alternatively, if data are gathered through other means, then for each time interval for which data is gathered, the correct amount can be filled in, thus using the calendar as a recording format.

A group discussion variant on this process is to divide participants into groups. Each group selects one or two “key informants”, who may have relevant expertise, to be interviewed by the rest of the group.
group. Based on this information, each group then makes a diagram to illustrate trends and changes in those activities and/or events over the time interval of interest. These are then presented to the whole group for discussion.

4. After several data entries, the calendar will show variations over time and so stimulate discussions to understand what the changes are and why they are occurring. By monitoring various types of changes simultaneously in one seasonal calendar or trend chart, certain patterns may become apparent such as how heavy work periods may occur during periods of indebtedness, illness and lower attendance at group meetings. Data can also be differentiated according to age and gender. However, the relevance of such variations will depend entirely on what it is that you want to monitor.

"Daily Routines" Variation

A variation on this method is to depict daily routines (or "how do I spend my 24 hours"), thus looking at daily patterns. This is useful for assessing key bottlenecks in daily tasks and how they can be overcome, or for making quantitative assessments of labour and inputs needed for daily tasks. Comparisons are made between the current situation and previous diagrams to identify how changes that have been introduced affect routines.

**Tips on use:**
The calendar method is ideal for monitoring over specific time periods, such as per season. Seasonal calendars that include a range of indicators can reveal how different patterns of change are linked and can be good for discussing causality of certain changes. Seasonal changes are particularly important for rural areas. They may significantly affect labour, water supplies, disease, food and income.

However, as with historical trends/timelines (see Method 22), seasonal calendars do not necessarily present accurate data. Cross-checking through direct measurement of, for example, time used to fetch water or incidence of diseases may be needed, depending on the accuracy you need.

If using this method with a group of people, it may be difficult to reach consensus on a "typical" or "average" calendar (particularly when it comes to daily routines). It might be best for each person to do one individually and then analyse the different routines together, or to select one or two individuals in the group as laid out in the second part of Step 3. Care must then be taken to limit biases in the sample.

**Method 24 Most Significant Change**

**Purpose:**
To identify cases of significant/critical changes – both positive and negative – relating to key objectives, rather than looking for trends related to a certain phenomenon. From an M&E perspective, this method can help track stories of changes related to less easily quantifiable issues, such as "capacity strengthening" or "gender equity".

**How to:**
1. Ask those involved to identify what aspects and types of changes they feel they need to track. These are the "domains" for which critical changes are tracked. This first step in itself is valuable, as it asks the group to identify the issues that they consider critically important for them to achieve – this requires clarity and consensus. These changes can relate directly to the goal and purpose of the project but might also be cross-cutting issues, such as "gender equity", that the implementing partners and project staff wish to track. Some examples of domains are:
changes in people's participation in credit groups;
changes in the sustainability of people's institutions and their activities;
changes in the use of participatory approaches by project staff with primary stakeholders;
changes in the project's contribution towards influencing government policy.

2. The frequency for discussion also needs to be decided and will depend on the likely rate of change in meeting the objectives. Some changes will take longer to be observable while others may occur on a weekly basis. A simple question is then developed, such as: “Since our last meeting, what has been the single most significant change related to... [INSERT THE DOMAIN]?” or “During the last three months, in our opinion, what do we think was the most significant change... [INSERT THE DOMAIN]?”

3. If discussions take place with a group, as will usually be the case, the need to reach consensus on the single change or event will provoke a rich and detailed review of the experiences of group members over the past period, and much debate about why one change is more significant than another.

4. The answer needs to be verifiable and so should be documented in two parts: (1) a description of what happened, with sufficient detail to allow another person to verify it if necessary (what happened, with whom, where, who was there, when did it take place, etc.), and (2) an explanation of why that particular change has been selected out of all the others that will have been suggested.

5. The findings will relate to positive or negative changes or events that occur as a result of project activities. It is possible to explicitly include both types of change – negative and positive – per domain. Where negative changes are identified, actions can be decided on to prevent or redress the problem. If a positive change is selected, then actions can be agreed to strengthen or spread these.

**Tips on use:**
It is a good idea to do a trial run of the domains before finalising them, to make sure that the wording of the change domain is clear to everyone.

This method explicitly does not try to identify the average. The selected changes are not representative but the most significant changes. If someone, from a coordinating committee for example, wishes to know the extent of a particular change, then this change becomes an indicator that is tracked for a defined period of time by everyone.

The original version of this method was used in a hierarchical organisational structure, in which micro-credit groups identified four types of changes. Field staff in turn selected the key changes – per domain – at the project-office level and sent them to headquarters. At headquarters, the stories of change were also selected from those coming from the different project offices and then passed to the biannual meetings of the funding agencies. All the stories of changes (24 in total, 4 domains x 6 months) were collated in the form of four chapters in a report. This shows the ease with which this method managed to synthesise a wide set of experiences into a manageable reporting structure and documentation.
D6 Methods for Analysing Linkages and Relationships

Fundamental for all projects is an understanding of changes in relationships and linkages between groups, such as primary stakeholders and organisations and also between issues, activities, causes and effects (anticipated or unexpected), inputs-outputs of systems, product cycles, resource or nutrient flows, and so forth. This cluster of methods provides ideas on how to analyse such issues by using different visualisation techniques.

Method 25 Rich Pictures (or Mind Maps)

**Purpose:**
To make a pictorial representation of the elements that need to be considered or are important to a particular (project) situation, including stakeholders and issues, and the interactions and connections between them. From an M&E perspective, a rich picture can help identify what aspects of a situation need to be monitored, which change indicators to track and/or which key stakeholders need to be included in the M&E efforts.

**How to:**
1. Using a large sheet of paper and symbols, pictures and words, draw a “rich picture” (or “mind map”) of the situation (project/group) that you wish to evaluate. This is best done with about four to eight people and takes a half to two hours.
2. Start by asking people to note all the physical entities involved, for example, the critical people, organisations or aspects of the landscape.
3. Ask people to present their rich picture by describing the key elements and key linkages between them.
4. If there is more than one group, compare their pictures and cluster the ideas that are similar and those that diverge. In this way you can identify the most important issues to discuss, such as critical topics to focus on in an evaluation, possible indicators or key stakeholders to include in M&E.

**Tips on use:**
A rich picture helps to open discussion and come to a broad, shared understanding of a situation. It does not tell you what has changed, although this may come up in discussion, and therefore is best used as an initial exercise in an annual project review or when designing the M&E system with different stakeholders.

Think carefully about whom to include in a group. If you want to have a representative picture, then the composition of the group will be different than if you want to have focused perspectives to compare.

Method 26 Impact Flow Diagram (or Cause-Effect Diagram)

**Purpose:**
To understand the contributing causes or reasons for a particular problem or issue, or to identify effects or impacts of a particular change (see Figure D-3). From an M&E perspective, this method can help to broaden insights about impact to include positive and negative, expected and unexpected, and direct and indirect impacts. It can also help identify general effects that form the basis for indicators that are tracked more systematically or quantitatively with other methods.

**How to:**
1. Start by putting the topic – with a symbol, photograph or in words – in the centre of a group (on the ground or a large flip chart). To work well, the topic must be specific, not as broad as “environmental degradation” but, for example, “use of contour bunds”. The broader the topic, the longer the
The topic can be a project activity, an event, a trend or a phenomenon such as “the use of rotating funds”.

2. Ask what has happened as a result of that activity (or trend/event). The answers, both positive and negative, are the consequences of that activity (trend/event) and are noted as symbols or with words. They are placed on the diagram to show how cause and effect are linked, with arrows or lines. Try also to probe for indirect consequences or, if someone mentions something that is an indirect consequence, then ask them to explain what caused this more directly. This helps the diagram develop in a series of cause-effect chains.

3. If quantitative information is needed, then questions can be asked about the amounts related to each impact that has been identified. For example, if farmers say, “we’ve noticed increased production”, then they may be able to estimate or measure how much that increase is worth or how many of the farmers involved in the trials have noticed an increase.

4. You can also ask if the impact has been the same for everyone and symbolise that on the map, with different groups having their own symbols. For example, if controlling banana weevil with a non-chemical alternative requires more labour input, show who has provided this input – women or men – and what the impact has been for the women, men or children involved.

5. Repeat the exercise with an agreed frequency. You can use past diagrams for comparison to generate a discussion on why changes might be occurring and how the rate of change is progressing.

6. If several flow diagrams are made with different groups and aggregation is required, they can be compiled into a single diagram, which then forms the basis of discussion. Be careful, though, when attributing change to different people. By aggregating effects onto one flow diagram, you may lose the precision of knowing which group identified which effect. By colour-coding the effects, this can be prevented.

**Tips on use:**

In these diagrams, the linkages are represented with lines or arrows. If arrows are to be used, make sure that everyone is clear about what arrows mean as they are not a universal symbol.

Flow diagrams provide an overview of change, from the perspective of the people who are involved in the discussion. So do a crosscheck with other groups and other methods.

Impact flow diagrams can be used to identify areas for potential improvements. Be careful not to include too much detail in one diagram as it can easily become too dense to analyse well.

**Figure D-3. Impact flow diagram on the gender-differentiated consequences of decreased access to water in Burkina-Faso**

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Method 27 Institutional Linkage Diagram (or Venn/Chapati Diagram)

**Purpose:**
To illustrate the extent to which individuals, organisations, projects or services interact with each other and the relative importance (i.e., power dynamics) of each to the issue being evaluated. From an M&E perspective, this method can be used to monitor the quality of relationships and how these relationships are changing and to identify problem areas where corrective action is needed.

**How to:**
1. Start by ensuring that the topic is completely clear for everyone – that you are discussing the relative importance of groups/people/organisations and their interactions. The term “importance” can be interpreted in different ways. It can refer to the nature and quality of relationships, the diversity of linkages, the reasons for contact and the frequency of contact. And rather than discussing organisations, you can focus on services and programmes. So reach agreement beforehand on what “importance” means.

2. Have a general discussion during which the different groups, people and organisations that relate to the topic are identified. If participants are including many organisations (more than 15-20), it may be necessary to limit the scope in order to have enough time to finish the exercise. You can do this by prioritising the most relevant groups/people/organisations and focusing your discussion around these.

3. Represent each of the entities identified with a separate circle. First represent the central element to which the others are relating (e.g., a community of primary stakeholders, the project unit or a micro-credit group). You can use paper circles of different sizes or ask participants to draw them. The size of the circle is critical: the larger the circle, the more important the group is for the topic being discussed. And the closer the circles are to each other, the more interaction there is. Overlapping circles represent groups/people with shared functions and a small circle within a larger circle represents a unit within the larger group/organisation.

4. If working with more than one group, compare the diagrams and discuss any differences. Further discussions may focus on areas where problems need resolving, such as conflict resolution or organisational capacity building.

5. Subsequent monitoring events can be tackled in one of two ways:
   a) Make a new diagram at each monitoring event that can then be compared with previous diagrams to analyse changes and their causes.
   b) Use the first diagram to discuss how the current situation is different and why this is the case. These changes can be symbolised, for example, with arrows pointing up to show increase, or down to show a decrease, eliminating a circle, adding others, etc.

Whatever approach is used, discussions should focus on the quality, frequency, appearance or disappearance of linkages between the groups.

**Tips on use:**
This method, if facilitated well, provides valuable insights into power structures and decision-making processes. It may help to highlight contrasting perceptions of different roles, responsibilities and linkages, pointing to areas of conflict and dispute and also pointing to ways of resolving these. This method can help identify ways to improve their working relationships with other organisations or groups.

The method works well early on in a self-evaluation process, helping people to locate themselves in relation to other groups or institutions regarding a particular issue.
An institutional linkage diagram can be followed by a ranking exercise by having participants rank relationships and compare these to the recent past.

- Ask participants to identify all of the organisations or groups with whom they have had significant working relationships (past and present). Write these on a card.
- They should then rank these relationships in order of importance (according to performance and viability). Write these rankings on the cards and place them in descending order of importance along the vertical axis of a matrix.
- Define the relationships of the organisations (funding agency, community organisation, technical training support, etc.) and write down these classifications along the horizontal axis of the matrix. Fill out the matrix by placing an “X” in each box that matches the organisation with the relevant type of relationship.
- Decide on a scoring system (e.g., from 1-5, 1 = “poor, significant improvement required” to 5 = “excellent, almost no improvement required”). Score as a group or individually, the quality of the current relationship with each organisation. Write the score to the right of each X.
- Then score each relationship as it existed in the recent past. Write these scores to the left of each “X” in the matrix, using another colour. This then shows how the pattern of relationships has evolved over time. See Table D-3 for an idea of how an institutional matrix would look.

### Table D-3. Example of an institutional matrix (Note: scores to the left = three years ago, scores to the right = present)\(^\text{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Donors (Grant Funding Only)</th>
<th>Community Organisations</th>
<th>Technical Training Support</th>
<th>Networking (Peer Organisations)</th>
<th>Competition / Rivalry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 1</td>
<td>3 X 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 X 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 X 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 X 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 X 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 X 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Method 28 Problem and Objectives Trees

**Purpose:**
To identify a core problem and its effects and root causes, and to clarify and come to an agreement on core objectives and necessary activities to tackle the problem. The method helps initiate the process of producing or revising a logframe matrix in a participatory and understandable way. From an M&E perspective, this method is critical at project start-up to revise the existing logframe and reach clarity about the precise objectives and outputs that will be monitored.

**How to:**

**Problem Tree**
1. Start with a brainstorm on all major problems existing within the framework of the situation analysis. With the group, decide which is to be the starter problem. This does not mean discarding the others but simply selecting one as a core problem. This is often formulated in quite general terms, for example, “deforestation” or “decreasing food security”.

2. Draw a tree and write the starter problem on the trunk. If you want to look at more than one problem, then you will need to draw one tree per problem. Each tree requires considerable time.

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\(^{15}\) Gubbels and Koss 2000, 141, see Further Reading.
3. Encourage people to brainstorm on the causes of the starter problem – they can use the outputs of the first brainstorm as a beginning (see Method 11). Ask for major problems that cause the starter problem. Alternatively, to avoid a few people dominating, hand out three to five blank cards per person and ask everyone to write down one idea per card. Present the cards and use them as the basis for the discussion on prioritising problems.

4. To focus on the root causes of the problem, discuss the factors that are possibly contributing to it. Examine each factor in relation to each of the other factors and ask, “Is it caused by or a cause of the other factor?” If it is caused by the other factor, draw a line with an inward arrow between the pair. If it is the cause of the other item, draw a line with an outward arrow between the pair. Draw the arrow only in the direction of the strongest effect. Do not use two-way arrows. If there is no interrelationship do not draw a line between them at all. When you are finished, the factors with the most outward arrows will generally be the factors that will drive change - the root causes.

5. Focus attention on these root causes and write them onto the roots of the “tree”.

6. For each root cause, write down its causes on roots lower down. Use the brainstormed ideas for this.

7. Following the same procedure as in Steps 2 and 3, look at what the effects/impacts of the problem are and write down the primary effects on the branches of the tree.

8. For each effect, write down its secondary effects on secondary branches higher up to obtain cause-effect chains.

9. Follow this exercise with an “objectives tree” to identify what actions are needed to tackle the (causes of the) problems as expressed in the problem tree.

Objectives Tree

1. Taking the problem tree above as your base, invert all the problems in order to make them into objectives. This process then leads into an “objectives tree” with the central objective simply being the inverse of the central problem.

2. Ask participants then to look at these objectives and discuss which of these can be tackled by the project.

3. The problem and objectives trees are a first step towards producing a logical framework matrix (see Section 3). Figure D-4 shows an example of corresponding problem and objectives trees obtained in Zambia.
Figure D-4. A problem tree with its inverse, the objectives tree, from an exercise in Zambia
Tips on use:
The two “trees” provide a comprehensive though simplified view of cause and effect relationships. In this way, the process of creating a logical framework can become more accessible to primary (and other) stakeholders, making it easier to involve them in revising the project design or developing their own activities.

This method is more geared towards project design than towards M&E. Yet it is critical for subsequent M&E sessions, as this requires the utmost clarity in goal, purpose, outputs and activities.

Linkages are represented with lines or arrows. If arrows are to be used, make sure that everyone is clear about what arrows mean as they are not a universally understood symbol.

Method 29 M&E Wheel (or “Spider Web”)

Purpose:
To provide a visual index that helps in assessing the issue being monitored or evaluated in terms of its ideal, or in comparing two or more monitoring sites and how they change over time. This method can also be used to measure how well a project is meeting anticipated targets, or how an organisation’s capacities change, over time. From an M&E perspective, the spider web provides a visual means of measuring changes in ratings on chosen indicators.

How to:
1. Make sure that the topic being assessed is clear. For example, the idea of “the capacity of an organisation” (see Figure D-5) must be very clear and understood by all of the participants. Have the participants agree on which criteria to use to assess the quality of the topic. These are, in fact, the indicators. For this, you can brainstorm (Method 11).

2. The selected indicators are arranged in the form of a wheel, with each indicator being one “spoke” as on a bicycle wheel. The spokes are spaced equidistant to one another. The indicators can be represented by words or symbols.

3. Next, participants agree on how to rank each indicator – from 0 as the lowest/worst level to 100 (or 25, 10, etc.) representing the highest/best level. It does not matter if 0 is on the outer edge of the wheel and 100 in the centre or the other way around, as long as all the spokes on the wheel are the same.

4. Once the wheel has been made, assess each indicator. If doing this with a group, then there will need to be consensus on the final score (or an average figure). Indicate the place on the spoke that corresponds with the final score given. Then join all the scores, which are marked as points on the spokes, to show what ends up looking like a spider web. A look at the spider web gives a quick overview of key weaknesses and key strengths. The weaker aspects of the issue being assessed are those that have scores closest to 0.

5. Previously made wheels can be revisited at subsequent monitoring sessions in order to compare how the situation changes over time.

Tips on use:
The spider web can be used to help represent different organisations’ capacities by grouping the organisations according to sector, for example, in order to assess their overall status or training needs within that sector. However, it only gives an indication of perceptions and direction of change, not precise measurements.

If the wheels are made on overhead transparencies with a standardised size of wheel, the evaluations of several organisations/project areas/etc. of the same situation over time can be overlaid to see very clearly how they differ or have changed.
Changes in the average opinion or points per indicator form the basis of discussing why such changes have occurred. The larger the point system is, the more complex it can become and also the more meaningless the discussion, as people may not be able to indicate exact numeric differences, for example deciding between 28 or 29 points within a range of 0 to 50. On the other hand, if people are scoring on a scale of 1 to 3, then it will be much easier to reach a general consensus, but then the answer will only serve as an extremely general indication.

Figure D-5. A comparison of two spider webs representing the capacities of two organisations in Nepal at a certain point in time.

Method 30 Systems (or Inputs-Outputs) Diagram

**Purpose:**
To allow for a detailed analysis of flows of inputs and outputs in a system (such as a farm, a forest, an organisation or even a larger geographical region). Systems diagrams can help to analyse the inputs needed to make the system work, as well as its outputs. From an M&E perspective, this method can help assess, for example, if blockages are being alleviated or new ones emerging, where quantitative gains are being made in terms of output increases, where inputs are preventing progress, etc.

**How to:**
1. Start by representing the system topic at the centre of the board, flip chart, sheet of paper, etc.
2. Ask the participant(s) what main activities take place within this system. These are then symbolised around the central topic on the diagram and linked with arrows. If the activities are symbolised or written on loose cards, then it is easier to adjust the diagram as the discussion develops.
3. Ask what inputs are needed for each activity to be possible and what outputs emerge from each activity. These inputs and outputs should be placed on the diagram to show the linkages.
4. As the discussion progresses about the inputs and outputs for each activity, each activity becomes a subsystem and linkages emerge between these subsystems. For example, an output from the activity of crop production, like fodder, will be an input into the activity of livestock management. If useful, numerical properties of flows can also be written in, for example, how many labour days are being invested in the home garden or how much organic fertiliser is being applied in different plots.
5. At each monitoring event, changes in the inputs and outputs are noted either on the systems diagram itself or on a flip chart next to it. Comparing changes in the types and quantities of inputs and outputs is the basis for discussing why such changes might have occurred.

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6. If several systems diagrams are made with different stakeholders/groups and aggregation is required for a community or geographic area, these can be compiled and linked within a single diagram. However, you will lose the specificities of individual conditions.

Tips on use:
Particular inputs and outputs can be focused upon for greater detail, for example, a commodity flow diagram, which looks at the movement of commodities between areas.

Gender/Age/Well-being-differentiated analyses of systems diagrams allow for detailed insights into how different members of a household or different types of households view changes and bottlenecks in the system.

D.7 Methods for Ranking and Prioritising

Ranking is critical when comparing elements or information on the basis of strength, importance or other predefined criteria. A simple example of ranking is to ask participants in an M&E meeting to each assign a number from one to ten to a particular project activity according to their view of its effectiveness. This can stimulate discussion among the wider group on project progress. By going further to assign each element a value in relationship to the others, you are then prioritising through identifying the relative weight, strength or value of each.

Method 31 Social Mapping or Well-Being Ranking

Purpose:
To identify households on the basis of predefined indicators related to socio-economic conditions. This method concentrates on a relative ranking of people’s socio-economic conditions (e.g., relatively well-off and worse-off), rather than making an absolute assessment. From an M&E perspective, this method can help assess which households are benefiting from the project and if these belong to the intended target group.

How to:
1. First, clarify what “household” means locally, since local definitions of terms like “household”, “compound” or “extended family” vary considerably. Then discuss what constitutes well-being locally. Ask if there are differences between households and what types of differences these are. This usually leads to some discussions about broad groups or levels of well-being in the community.

Option 1. Social mapping

a. Prepare a base map on which all the households of the area being analysed are located (e.g., a village, a neighbourhood, a rural zone, etc.).

b. Ask the participants to code each household according to its level of well-being in comparison to others. Each level can be given its own symbol or colour code. Make sure you crosscheck the coding of each household by ensuring there is consensus about the code. In this way, a base map can be made in which households are clustered according to different rankings of well-being. Include a legend on the map that explains the symbols and codes.

c. Now focus on the indicators in which you are interested (e.g., “school attendance of children”, “involved in a certain project activity”, “member of a micro-credit group”). Code each household according to its status.
d. The base map can then be used to monitor the well-being of each household from year to year and to relate the households to changes introduced by a project. This makes it possible to examine whether there are any impacts occurring on well-being or other socio-economic indicators in focus and, if so, how the impacts may affect different social groups.

Option 2. Well-being ranking with cards

a. Each household name is written on a card.

b. The cards are then sorted into different piles of similarly ranked households. You start with any two households, asking people to compare them in terms of which is better off than the other. If they have different levels of well-being, then they are placed in different piles of cards. If they are more or less the same, they go in one pile.

c. One by one, other households are compared to the first two. This can lead to the identification of new levels if they are worse-off or better-off than the households already classified. They may be identified as having a similar level of well-being of an existing group of households and thus go to an existing pile. Number each pile per informant, so that you know in which pile each household was placed.

d. This needs to be repeated three times and then an average score calculated, to remove interviewee knowledge biases. Calculations are done as follows. Write the score for each household for each informant as follows (with Pile 1 being the best off pile):

\[
\text{average score} = \frac{\text{pile number of households} \times 100}{\text{total number of piles}}
\]

Compute average scores for each household as the total of its scores divided by the number of its scores. Households must have two scores to be included, so if only one person knows how to place a household there is insufficient information on them to be included. Write the average score for each household in large numbers on index cards. Put the index cards in order from lowest to highest average score (best off to worst off). Divide the ranked cards into groups where there is a clear cluster of scores. It is these groups that you can then use for your sample.

Tips on use:
Social mapping can provide an overview of any socio-economic aspects, such as leadership, professions, skills and experiences in a community, as well as its well-being. However, well-being ranking focuses on a community's perceptions of well-being, such as status, size of land and family, income, etc. In both cases, with your base map and your clustered households, you can focus on any monitoring issue such as “access of poor/middle/higher-income households to water supply and sanitation facilities”.

Both methods are also useful for a purpose or quota sampling procedure, by making a selection from different well-being classes.

By discussing what well-being means at each monitoring event, it is also possible to track changes in the criteria of well-being to see if people's aspirations are shifting.

This method is most useful when ranking in groups of a limited size. You can use it in larger communities, focusing on neighbourhood-specific rankings, but it will be difficult to compare results between sections.

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Table D-4. Example of a well-being ranking exercise in an IFAD-supported project in a village in Laos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RICH = 2 people</th>
<th>MEDIUM = 33</th>
<th>POOR = 18</th>
<th>VERY POOR = 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough rice for 12 months</td>
<td>Enough rice for 8-12 months</td>
<td>Enough rice for 3-6 months</td>
<td>Enough rice for 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large amount of paddy land in valley (up to 5 ha)</td>
<td>Little paddy land (up to 0.5 ha with 2-3 ha upland cultivation)</td>
<td>Small extent of land to cultivate in upland (0.5-1.5 ha)</td>
<td>Little upland rice cultivation (less than 0.5 ha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10-15 cows and buffaloes and 50-60 poultry Elephant or hand tractor Enough bullock power</td>
<td>Around 5-10 cows and buffaloes, 5 pigs and 20-30 poultry Sometimes elephant Bullocks for land preparation</td>
<td>Less than 2 cows and buffaloes; 1 or 2 pigs, and 15 chickens Sometimes an elephant (inherited) Usually no bullocks for land preparation</td>
<td>A few chickens, occasionally pigs No plough/bullocks for land preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent brick house with field roof</td>
<td>Wooden house with galvanised iron or aluminium sheet roof</td>
<td>Bamboo house with thatched roof</td>
<td>Poor condition bamboo house with thatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns two- or four-wheel vehicle</td>
<td>Owns two-wheel vehicle</td>
<td>Sometimes owns bicycle</td>
<td>Has no assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes rice mills</td>
<td>Occasional rice mill</td>
<td>No rice mill</td>
<td>No rice mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to hire labour</td>
<td>Does not work as labour and occasionally hires labour</td>
<td>Cannot hire labour</td>
<td>Mainly sells labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has no deficit</td>
<td>Makes up deficit by sale of livestock and business Occasionally goes to forest</td>
<td>Always has deficit Depends on forest and sale of labour</td>
<td>Always depends on selling labour and forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>Occasional health problems</td>
<td>Sick often</td>
<td>Poor health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method 32 Matrix Scoring

Purpose:
To make a relative comparison between different options of a specific issue or solutions to a problem, and to make a detailed analysis of how much and why people prefer one option above the other. Matrix scoring shows how well options meet predefined criteria. From an M&E perspective, this method can be used to understand people's opinions on, for example, different service providers, on different types of project activities that are aiming to reduce a problem, on different technologies (such as seed varieties, water sources).

How to:
1. First be clear about what you are comparing and place these options/issues in a row, along a horizontal axis. The more there are, the longer the scoring will take so, if necessary, prioritise items to be scored.

2. The group next discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each item/solution/issue to generate the criteria that will be used to compare each of the options. Each criterion is placed along the vertical axis to create a matrix. If you find that the number of criteria is very large, either ensure you have enough time to finish the discussion or ask the group to prioritise key criteria on which to focus. Ensure that the criteria are all worded in the same way, all either in positive terms or in negative terms. Mixing the two types of criteria will cause confusion in the next stage.

3. Then start the scoring. The items are compared for each criterion. Decide how much will be the maximum score. There are different ways to establish the number of points to use for scoring. You can allocate a maximum of points per box – for example, 15 as "the best" – or specify a total number of points to allocate per criterion across the boxes, for instance, 25. Participants can use stones, seeds or numbers for the scoring, with more stones indicating higher scores and therefore better ability to
fulfil that criterion. Usually, consensus is reached through discussion. Avoid individual voting in the matrix scoring exercise as this defeats the purpose of stimulating discussion to reach consensus on preferred options and understand the reasons for preference.

**Table D-5. Transfer of tasks and responsibilities matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Group</td>
<td>Local NGO</td>
<td>Local Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>XXXX XXXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing trainers</td>
<td>XXXX X</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling trainings</td>
<td>XXXX XXXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>XXXX XXXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising participants</td>
<td>XXXX XX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing training tools</td>
<td>XXXX X</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>XXXX XXXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent change from 1995</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tips on use:**

Besides the resulting matrix, one of the greatest values of this method comes from the discussions that are provoked as participants come to a decision about the final score of each option (as well as on settling on the criteria for scoring). In the discussion, the reasons for preferences and rejection of options emerge.

Matrix scoring can also be useful to identify key indicators that can then be monitored regularly using other methods. The indicators are selected from among the criteria (i.e., the advantages and disadvantages of each option) that have been identified.

**Variations on this method:**

Variation A. Transfer of tasks and responsibilities matrix (see Table D-5 above for an example)

This application helps identify the degree to which tasks and responsibilities have been transferred from a project to the community group(s). It can help identify indicators for this transfer of responsibility (i.e., capacity-building) and is essential for clarifying the phasing-out strategy.

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18 Gubbels and Koss 2000, 155, see Further Reading.
How to:
1. For each programme sector addressed by the project, ask participants to name all the major tasks and responsibilities necessary for running an effective and viable programme.

2. Write each response (on cards if you like) on the vertical axis of a matrix.

3. Have participants name all the major actors or interest groups who are directly involved in running the project (donors, village group, government extension agents, technical support, etc.). Write these actors in along the top horizontal axis of the matrix.

4. For each task, ask participants to distribute ten beans (or stones) among the various actors according to how much responsibility they have for a task, with ten representing total responsibility.

5. Repeat the process to reflect the situation in the recent past. Decide together on the time period for assessing change (e.g., five years). Move the task cards to the left in order to create space for another matrix section.

6. Duplicate the actor cards and place them in the same order at the top of the second section of the matrix (see diagram).

7. Have participants place the beans under each actor to reflect the past situation.

8. If time permits, repeat the process to allow participants to envision what the situation will be like in the future. Create a third section on the matrix and repeat the above process, distributing the beans according to what hopes are for future distribution of responsibility.

Variation B. Community-level support/self-reliance matrix

This method helps with reflection on community self-reliance upon phasing-out. It can assess the effectiveness of the project’s strategy to promote self-reliance and to strengthen the capacities of the community groups with which it works. It fosters understanding of the connection between creating self-reliance and the ability of the project to achieve a wider impact.

How to:
1. On cards, write the names of the different stakeholder groups involved in a project and the date they started working with the project.

2. On each card, write using symbols or letters to represent which project activities they undertake (e.g. management training, loan disbursement in the case of credit, etc.).

3. Sort the cards into one of three categories indicating the level of support each has received (high, medium, low). But make sure you are clear about what you mean by “support” (e.g., number of support visits, training or funding provided, etc.).

4. Introduce the concept of self-reliance and ask the participants to list characteristics of group “self-reliance”. For example: able to cover core operating costs, able to plan, monitor and evaluate programmes, able to access external resources, able to form partnerships, able to mobilise group members for collective action, able to implement development programmes, able to elect representative leaders, etc.

5. Write these characteristics down on another set of cards (different colour, one characteristic per card).

6. Then identify criteria for distinguishing between high, medium and low levels of self-reliance at this time. Ask participants to sort the cards into these three categories.
7. On the vertical axis of a matrix, label three rows: “high”, “medium” and “low” support; on the horizontal axis, designate three columns as “high”, “medium” and “low” self-reliance.

8. Place the cards in the appropriate boxes in the matrix.

9. Have a discussion on why groups fit into one category or another, whether/how the project can support the development of self-reliance better, what will happen when the project phases out, etc.

Method 33 Relative Scales or Ladders

**Purpose:**
To make a relative qualitative comparison of “before” and “after” situations related to specific indicators. This method can result in a diagram (as in a ladder drawn with indicators represented by symbols) or as written questions/indicators if they are difficult to depict. From an M&E perspective, this method can be used to assess qualitative aspects related to, for example, women’s self-esteem, the participation of marginalised groups or capacity-strengthening, which are otherwise hard to assess.

**How to:**
1. First, the group must choose its indicators. These can be formulated either as statements or questions.

2. There are two ways to compare changes in these indicators over time.

   a. The visual way, using a ladder for each indicator, where each rung - from bottom to top - represents an improvement:

      - At the first monitoring event, an assessment is made of where stakeholders think they stood before the intervention started (written to the left of the ladder at the rung that best represents the level). Then they should indicate on the right side of the ladder - at the appropriate rung - where they think their level is now as a result of the project or activity.

      - At each monitoring event, a new assessment is made of where the activity stands with respect to the rungs of the ladder for each indicator being monitored.

      - This forms the basis for discussing why changes have occurred and what action(s) might be required to reinforce positive changes or limit deterioration. The ladders can be used for individual stakeholders’ assessments of change and then discussed collectively, or the group can discuss the ladders until a consensus is reached about the status of the changes being monitored.

      - See Figure D-6 for an example of the result of a ladder exercise.

   b. Using a sliding scale to measure variation:

      - Start by coming up with a set of statements about an indicator. For example, if a group of farmers is interested in identifying “efficiency of meetings” as an indicator of the group’s success, then group members can revisit this indicator, for example, every 6 to 12 meetings, using the following points system,19

      - 3 points – Our meetings are always efficient: we use our time well, make clear decisions, and our decisions are implemented.

      - 2 points – Our meetings are usually efficient: we use our time well, make decisions that are usually clear, and our decisions are often implemented.

      - 1 point – Our meetings are sometimes efficient: we sometimes manage to avoid unnecessary discussion, and can make decisions but they are not always clear to everyone, and our decisions are sometimes implemented.

---

- 0 points - Our meetings are never efficient: we always talk without making any decisions and therefore are not implementing changes.

- At each monitoring event, see how the answers to the same set of questions vary over time, for example on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 (or 0 to 3 in the example above).

- Ask the group to reach consensus or for each person to vote, for example, choosing between: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “don’t know”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree” (or “most satisfactory”, “satisfactory”, “unsatisfactory” and “very unsatisfactory”).

- They can also choose between a range of points or a range of more or less happy looking faces.

Figure D-6. The ladder exercise undertaken by women to assess the impact of a training programme

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LADDER EXERCISE</th>
<th>BEFORE</th>
<th>AFTER</th>
<th>WYTP</th>
<th>REASON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AWARENESS</td>
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<td>Training from AGI families</td>
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<td>PRODUCTIVITY</td>
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<td>Training, Agriculture</td>
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<td>AND YIELD</td>
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<td>Training and Technology</td>
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<td>Implementation</td>
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<td>Training and income</td>
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<td>Economic status</td>
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<td>Making ability</td>
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<td>MAKING</td>
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<td>and confidence</td>
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<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
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<td>Greater confidence</td>
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<td>TO ASSETS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>due to training</td>
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<tr>
<td>USE OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased exposure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3. Final numbers or positions on the ladder are not the main outcome of this method. The most important parts are the discussion that occurs as group members reach agreement on whether the general direction of change is positive or negative and, of course, the analysis of why changes in the numbers/positions might be occurring.

Tips on use:
While this method also involves ranking, it differs from matrix scoring (Method 32) in that it only looks at one indicator at a time and gives it a rank by comparing past and present conditions relating to that single indicator.

Method 34 Ranking and Pocket Charts

Purpose:
To assess changes or patterns in people’s general opinions about a list of options, through a single overall ranking process. From an M&E perspective, this method is valuable to assess people’s opinions on a list of comparable options, for example, related to decision making in a local organisation or personal practices in relation to any topic, such as land management or personal hygiene (see Box D-14).

How to:
1. Make a complete list of all the options for the topic being monitored (maize varieties, sources of credit, erosion control measures, etc.).

2. When conducted with a group, you have a couple options for the ranking:
   • One option is that each participant can make his/her own ranked list and then an average ranking can be calculated for each option, to arrive at a collective ranked list.
   • A second option is to have the group reach consensus on the relative ranks, through group discussion, and make one collective ranking.

The second option will clearly provoke more discussion than the first and be open for domination from the more assertive participants.

A third, more visual and more general option is to ask people to give a relative weight or “value” to each option using a number of stones, a pile of sand or a segment of a pie chart. This approach clearly generates only a very general idea of preferences and priorities, but in some cases it is sufficiently accurate. If pie charts are used to gather the actual data, then they will usually only represent very approximate perceptions of people’s rankings. However, a pie chart can also be used to record precise findings as segments of a pie chart can represent exact percentages based on data that have been gathered through other means.

A fourth option involves a pocket chart, which is a chart that has a pocket for each option. First identify the different options you want to assess. Write or symbolise each option at the top of a column. If you want to monitor the rate of occurrence, for example, of certain health or land-use practices, place three or more rows (each with a pocket) below the columns, headed by “always”, “sometimes” and “never”. In this case, ask each person to place a vote per practice/habit in the right pocket. If you want to monitor, for instance, the participation of different groups in decision making, these groups are symbolised at the top. Then decide which aspects of decision making you want to monitor. These aspects become the vertical axis of the matrix, the column. Each cell in the chart has a pocket in which votes are cast.
3. If privacy is necessary, collect votes by turning the pocket chart around and having people come up one by one to cast their vote with a piece of paper or a stone or seed.

4. Count the votes and discuss the outcome together.

5. If you want to have analysis differentiated by gender or another categorisation, use different codes on the voting cards for the women and the men.

6. Alternatively, the group can discuss each question until they reach consensus.

7. A new ranking is made at each monitoring event and compared with previous rankings. Use the comparison with the results from previous events to discuss the changes and their possible causes, and what future action or adjustment of the activity is required.

8. A variation on this method is known as “one hundred seeds”. It helps an individual or group indicate an approximate percentage distribution, as represented visually in a pie chart. Give the person or group 100 seeds, beans or stones. These represent the sum total of the topic being discussed (e.g., sources of income, main expenditure items, types of health services, sources of fuel, etc.). First discuss the topic so that you list all the items, for example, all the sources of income or all the types of health services used. The person or group then divides the seeds across the items to indicate the relative distribution. For example, how much of the total (100%) of income comes from each income source, and how much of all health needs (100%) are covered per health service? These percentages can be shown as a pie chart, if desired.

Tips on use:
This method is useful particularly in situations where the subject being assessed is sensitive and people are inhibited about stating their views publicly.

This method is similar to matrix scoring (Method 32) and relative scales or ladders (Method 33). However, the matrix compares how a range of different options rate in terms of many criteria and the scales assess one option at a time, whereas ranking and pocket charts involve making a single overall ranking of a list of options. While matrix scoring is ideal for selecting the best among various options, from a monitoring perspective, a ranking exercise helps assess changes in people's general opinions about options.

A pocket chart is more complex than a simple ranking as it is used to make a series of overall rankings. The pocket chart is also more accurate since it allows assessment of the percentage of people with certain opinions. Filling in a pocket chart is usually done on an individual basis and may therefore provoke less discussion than matrix scoring. However, analysing the results afterwards with the group of participants will encourage collective reflection and will help give meaning to the data.

Box D-14. Example from the World Bank’s Water and Sanitation Programme

For hygiene behaviour patterns in a water and sanitation programme, people are asked to provide information (behind a voting screen) on where they defecate, using a range of pictures to depict sites used on the horizontal axis and pictures of different household members (women, men, girls, boys, toddlers and babies) along the vertical axis. This can be carried out “before” and “after” a sanitation project has been introduced to assess if personal hygiene has changed and how.

Further Reading


IIED. PLA Notes (Participatory Learning and Action Notes, formerly published as RRA Notes). Quarterly journal. London. Email: sustag@iied.org or internet: http://www.iied.org. Free for Asia, Africa and Latin America.


List of Booklets in the Guide

Section 1. Introducing the M&E Guide
Section 2. Using M&E to Manage for Impact
Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
Section 4. Setting up the M&E System
Section 5. Deciding What to Monitor and Evaluate
Section 6. Gathering, Managing and Communicating Information
Section 7. Putting in Place the Necessary Capacities and Conditions
Section 8. Reflecting Critically to Improve Action

Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)
Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks and Actors
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This Annex is useful for:

- Managers - to ensure that M&E staff have sufficient capacities to develop and implement the M&E system, and to supervise the contributions and performance of staff, partners and consultants;
- M&E staff - to check that proposed capacities and support are sufficient for M&E to be effective;
- IFAD and cooperating institution staff - to stipulate learning-oriented M&E comprehensively in job descriptions and terms of reference.
This Annex helps guide those responsible for contracting, including managers and IFAD and cooperating institution staff, in shaping project job descriptions to include M&E responsibilities based on the learning and participation-oriented ideas presented in this Guide. It outlines three job descriptions, two sets of external responsibilities that cover the most common M&E functions in a project and five terms of reference, or TOR (see Table E-1). It includes ideas for the M&E responsibilities of primary stakeholder groups. While it is not common for TOR to be drawn up for such groups, in some projects primary stakeholders are service providers and so have M&E responsibilities. The material in this annex focuses on the learning-oriented and participatory M&E principles on which this Guide is based.

Each project is unique in terms of hierarchies of control, timing of staff appointments, and numbers and locations of staff. Responsibilities may well differ and lie with different individuals than those suggested here. Develop your own TOR and job descriptions to suit project needs (see Box E-1). Draw on the material in this annex for inspiration.

For those projects wanting to strengthen their participation and learning focus, two questions might help when developing TORs or job descriptions: (1) How will this person contribute to the project’s learning processes? and (2) What aspects of participatory M&E need to be included in this individual’s TOR or job description?

### Box E-1. Elements to include when constructing your own TORs

| Background | ✔ Description of the project (goal, purpose, outcomes) | ✔ Contribution of the job contract to the project |
| Purpose of the task being contracted | ✔ Main purpose, key audience(s) and expected outputs | ✔ Formal decisions that the task supports and planned use of outputs from the task |
| Scope and method | ✔ Overall scope of the work | ✔ Desired type of analysis, approach and methods, particularly what is expected in terms of participatory approaches |
| Issues to be covered | ✔ Delimitation of themes in relation to the purpose of the task | ✔ Extent to which cross-cutting issues (gender, poverty, empowerment) are to be dealt with |
| Personnel requirements | ✔ Number of people to be involved in the task and the time allotted for each | ✔ Necessary professional qualifications and experience |
| Schedule | ✔ Starting date, timing of interim analysis, deadline | |
| Stakeholders to be involved | ✔ Who should be involved: authorities, institutions, groups, individuals, funding agency, cooperating institution, steering committee | ✔ How people/groups will be involved |
| Remuneration | ✔ Daily rates | ✔ Costs to be covered and not covered |
| Documentation | ✔ How invoicing and payment will proceed | ✔ Ownership of work and, therefore, extent to which documentation will be distributed |
Table E-1. List of key TORs and job descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Programme director w/ M&amp;E focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. M&amp;E coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. M&amp;E field staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Responsibilities That Could Be Included in Memoranda of Understanding

| 4. M&E responsibilities of general project (and partner) staff |
| 5. M&E responsibilities of primary stakeholder groups       |

Terms of Reference

| 6. Consultant – setting up the M&E system                |
| 7. Consultant – integrating participatory elements into M&E |
| 8. Consultant – developing information management        |
| 9. Implementing partner – M&E component                  |
| 10. Consultant team – mid-term review                    |
E.1 Project Director (M&E Aspects Only)

**General scope of the job (M&E-related)**

The project director will coordinate project management and ensure that implementation be realised according to the conditions of the loan agreement and based on the project appraisal report. This includes that ensuring the M&E requirements described are developed and implemented in a timely fashion that represents the views of key stakeholders. She/He is also responsible for making sure there is sufficient and appropriate personnel with the right level of resources and other support needed to implement good quality M&E.

**Organisational relationships (M&E-related)**

The project director will be responsible for project progress and the M&E system and will be accountable to the project coordination committee, relevant staff of the cooperating institution and funding agencies, and appropriate levels of government ministries. She/He will be accountable to staff (project and partner) and primary stakeholders for project progress, problems and strategy.

**Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related only)**

**Early implementation tasks**

- Establish the office structure for M&E coordination.
- Appoint key M&E staff to the project and supervise their activities.
- Guide the establishment of administrative, accounting and project-component M&E systems.
- Coordinate revision of the project strategy with key stakeholders to ensure an updated and shared understanding of the strategy and information needs.
- Negotiate approval for changes to the project strategy and processes with funding agencies and cooperating institutions.
- Ensure that an effective and participatory M&E system is established in as decentralised a manner as is possible and would be effective.

**Ongoing management tasks**

- Prepare the AWBP and revise the M&E plan and system by seeking stakeholder inputs in order to produce these plans with the full commitment of all the organisations involved in the project. Present the AWBP and M&E plan to the relevant approval bodies in a timely manner for review and approval.
- For each service provider contract, ensure that detailed specifications are prepared in a timely, objective, fair and transparent manner, including the M&E responsibilities and administration of terms and awards.
- Make sure the business of the project is conducted in an efficient manner by supervising and monitoring project implementation. Ensure that timely decisions on corrective actions are made and implemented.
- Direct and supervise the day-to-day operations of the project, guided by the project document and the AWBP, providing any necessary amendments to ensure smooth performance.
- Mobilise relevant M&E technical assistance in a timely manner, with clearly demarcated responsibilities that are based on the participatory and equity principles of the project.
• Assure that all contractual obligations are adhered to and make the necessary contacts and efforts to ensure implementation meets project targets.

• Regularly appraise staff and provide feedback and support to enable them to do their jobs better.

Communication

• Develop close working relationships with all project participants and stakeholders – including the primary stakeholders, line departments, private sector and NGOs – all parties required to establish a shared vision of the project and achieve objectives.

• Establish and maintain good working relations with the relevant government ministries, as well as other higher-level stakeholder groups.

• Ensure easy public access to M&E reports and data and make sure they are widely distributed.

• Submit required analytical reports on progress – including indications of planned actions and financial statements – on time and to the relevant bodies, with assistance from M&E staff.

• Encourage staff to report frankly on fieldwork, highlighting problems and possible solutions plus lessons learned. Reward innovation in critical reflection and learning.

• Ensure the planning of and participate in key reflection moments – in particular, the annual project reviews.

• Sign implementation agreements with the implementing partners, defining the modalities for implementation and M&E. Ensure that participatory M&E and learning initiatives are specified in terms consistent with the direction of the project.

• Control the budget and safeguard against project funds and assets misuse.

• Make all efforts to engage key stakeholders in important external evaluations to ensure an understanding of locally perceived impacts and problems.

• See that all ad hoc evaluation studies needed to gain timely and relevant insights into emerging areas of concern are undertaken. Make sure the data are shared with all those involved in decision making and follow up on the implementation of any decisions.

• Support external missions in ways that foster a joint learning process that identifies how the project could be improved further to achieve impact.

E.2 M&E Coordinator

A project might choose not to centralise the M&E function around one coordinator. The responsibilities and tasks listed below will then need to be explicitly linked to other project stakeholders if project M&E is to function well.

General scope of the job

The M&E coordinator is responsible for guiding the overall M&E strategy and implementation of related activities within the project and via partners, plus providing timely and relevant information to project stakeholders. This entails close communication with all involved in M&E design and coordination: core project and partner M&E staff; representatives from the steering committee or similar unit; representatives from primary stakeholder groups; and the project director, external consultants and field staff when appropriate, plus members of external M&E-related missions.
Critical tasks for the M&E coordinator are setting up the M&E system and ensuring it is implemented effectively by the key stakeholders, namely the primary stakeholders and implementing partners. This is undertaken through the joint development of a shared M&E system that is based on existing formal and informal mechanisms and systems among key stakeholders. This needs to be supported by facilitating stakeholders to value, have appropriate capacities for and undertake their own M&E activities, and to link these into an overall assessment of project progress and needed actions.

**Organisational relationships**

Note: organisational relationships cannot be detailed in this sample job description as project structures vary too much. However, a job description should specify to whom the M&E coordinator reports. It should also include with whom she/he must consult when making decisions, including consultations with partners and primary stakeholders, when it comes to consensus on methodology and on analysis of the implications of M&E data.

**Responsibilities and tasks**  
**undertaken with others involved in M&E design and implementation**

**Setting up the system**

- Help revise the project logframe matrix, particularly in the areas of the objective hierarchy, indicators and monitoring mechanisms.
- Help develop the AWPB.
- Develop the overall framework for project M&E, for example, annual project reviews, participatory impact assessments, process monitoring, operations monitoring and lessons-learned workshops.
- Guide the process for identifying and designing the key indicators for each component, to record and report physical progress against the AWPB. Also steer the process for designing the format of such progress reports.
- Guide the process for identifying the key performance questions and parameters for monitoring project performance and comparing it to targets. Design the format for such performance reports.
- Clarify the core information needs of central project management, the steering committee (or similar body), funding agencies and the cooperating institution.
- With stakeholders, set out the framework and procedures for the evaluation of project activities.
- Review the quality of existing social and economic data in the project area, the methods of collecting it and the degree to which it will provide good baseline statistics for impact evaluation.
- Based on the review of existing data on the area, draw up the TOR for, design and cost out a baseline survey and a needs assessment survey.
- With the implementing partners, review their existing approaches and management information systems and agree on any required changes, support and resources.
- Identify other M&E staff that the project needs to contract. Guide recruitment.
- Recruit, guide and supervise organisations that are contracted to implement special surveys and studies required for evaluating project effects and impacts.
• Ensure that all service provider contracts include specifications for the internal monitoring required of them, the reporting systems and the penalties for failure to report as specified.

• Develop a plan for project-related capacity-building on M&E and for any computer-based support that may be required.

• Organise and undertake training with stakeholders, including primary stakeholders, in M&E skills, including participatory aspects.

Implementation of M&E

• Based on the AWPB and in particular the programme budgets, design the framework for the physical and process monitoring of project activities.

• Guide staff and implementing partners in preparing their progress reports. Together, analyse these reports in terms of problems and actions needed. Prepare consolidated progress reports for project management to submit to the relevant bodies, in accordance with approved reporting formats and timing.

• Review monitoring reports, analyse them for impact evaluation and to identify the causes of potential bottlenecks in project implementation.

• Collaborate with staff and implementing partners on qualitative monitoring to provide relevant information for ongoing evaluation of project activities, effects and impacts.

• Foster participatory planning and monitoring by training and involving primary stakeholder groups in the M&E of activities.

• Identify the need and draw up the TORs for specific project studies.

• Ensure that, in general, project monitoring arrangements comply with the project loan agreement and, in particular, the provisions of this agreement are fully observed in the design of project M&E.

• Inform and join external supervision and evaluation missions – of funding and other agencies – by screening and analysing monitoring reports as well as by furnishing direct personal knowledge of the field situation.

• Organise (and provide) refresher training in M&E for project and implementing partner staff, local organisations and primary stakeholders.

• Plan for regular opportunities to identify lessons learned and implications for the project’s next steps. Participate in these events when possible.

Communication

• Prepare reports on M&E findings, as required, working closely with financial controller, technical staff and implementing partners.

• Undertake regular visits to the field to support implementation of M&E and to identify where adaptations might be needed.

• Guide the regular sharing of the outputs of M&E findings with project staff, implementing partners and primary stakeholders.

• In collaboration with the accountant, provide the project director with management information that she/he may require.

• Make regular reports to the project board (or equivalent decision-making structure), highlighting areas of concern and preparing the documentation for review at meetings.
• Check that monitoring data are discussed in the appropriate forum and in a timely fashion in terms of implications for future action. If necessary, create such discussion forums to fill any gaps.

• Participate in external missions and facilitate mission team members’ access to M&E data and to stakeholders.

Qualifications and experience required

**Note** in this sample job description it is not possible to specify exact qualifications as they will depend on the structure of your project. Generally speaking, suitable candidates should have a degree in a field related to development and/or management and experience in field research. Statisticians are sometimes given the job of M&E coordinator. While statistical skills are essential to include, they do not provide the breadth of understanding about reflective analysis to guarantee the candidate would be suitable.

At least several years of proven experience with:

• the logical framework approach and other strategic planning approaches;

• M&E methods and approaches (including quantitative, qualitative and participatory);

• planning and implementation of M&E systems;

• training in M&E development and implementation;

• facilitating learning-oriented analysis sessions of M&E data with multiple stakeholders;

• information analysis and report writing.

She/He must also have:

• a solid understanding of rural development, with a focus on participatory processes, joint management, and gender issues;

• familiarity with and a supportive attitude towards processes of strengthening local organisations and building local capacities for self-management;

• willing to undertake regular field visits and interact with different stakeholders, especially primary stakeholders;

• computer skills;

• leadership qualities, personnel and team management (including mediation and conflict resolution).

Desirable:

• experience in M&E system design;

• experience in data processing and with computers.
E.3 M&E Staff

Staffing arrangements will vary according to the project budget and structure. The general principle is to decentralise the M&E function among stakeholders, encouraging and facilitating them to share their capacities and insights in joint M&E. Therefore, the roles and tasks listed below will need to be distributed among other staff and partners as appropriate for your context. The ideas below focus on three types of M&E staff that are commonly (but not always) found in projects: M&E support officer, regional/district level M&E officer and data management officer.

M&E Support Officer

General scope of the job

The M&E support officer is responsible for the operation of the project M&E system at # level (fill in level as appropriate to your context).

Organisational relationships

She/He reports to the M&E coordinator. As with all project staff, she/he is also accountable to primary stakeholder groups.

Responsibilities and tasks

Assist the M&E coordinator and all those involved in project M&E, particularly primary stakeholder groups, in:

- revising the project objective hierarchy and logframe matrix (activities, processes, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts);
- determining information needs of project management, implementing partners and primary stakeholders, the cooperating institution and funding agencies;
- identifying and designing performance questions, key indicators and targets for each project component and for each level of the objective hierarchy;
- agreeing how to record, report and analyse progress against the AWPB and designing the format of such progress reports;
- reviewing existing social and economic data for the project area to assess if it can provide good baseline data for impact evaluation, identifying gaps to be filled;
- drawing up the TOR, designing and costing out a baseline survey and a needs assessment survey (as appropriate);
- designing the formats and procedures for operational monitoring;
- identifying the need and drawing up the TOR for specific evaluation studies;
- reviewing existing M&E and management information systems of implementing partners and identifying where support is needed;
- collecting, compiling and analysing reports prepared by implementing partners and preparing consolidated progress reports for project management to submit to the project steering committee, appropriate ministries, cooperating institution and IFAD, in accordance with approved reporting formats;
• reviewing monitoring reports to assess interim impacts and identify causes of potential bottlenecks in implementation;

• collaborating with implementing partners and primary stakeholders to develop feasible and effective discussion events where M&E data are analysed and corrective actions can be agreed upon;

• guiding and supervising organisations that are sub-contracted to implement special surveys or studies required for evaluating project effects and impacts;

• training on M&E and facilitating M&E design and implementation processes with implementing partners and primary stakeholders;

• undertaking and facilitating others to implement the M&E plan, regularly revising and updating performance questions, indicators, methods, formats and analytical processes.

Qualifications and experience required

• Degree in relevant discipline

• At least two years of experience in: participatory assessment and monitoring, data processing or analysis and computer experience, training, facilitation and communication skills, and M&E design experience

• Ability to organise and train office staff

• For community assessment and for project design, evaluation and implementation: good contextual knowledge of local issues, community priorities and social and cultural constraints and realities

District/Regional Level M&E Officer

General scope of the job
The district/regional level officer is in charge of all monitoring and evaluation data collection activities, survey work and analytical sessions undertaken at his/her level.

Organisational relationships
The district/regional level M&E officer is expected to work closely with and be answerable to the M&E support officer and M&E coordinator (besides answering to the requirements of the ministry from which she/he comes, if not directly contracted by the project). As with all project staff, she/he is accountable to primary stakeholder groups.

Responsibilities and tasks
She/he is responsible for data gathering, district/regional training and facilitation, scheduling, sampling, quality of field staff and the quality implementation and timely submission of all forms and reports. She/He will undertake the routine field checking of the work of enumerators and other M&E-related field staff, supervise quality in the field and ensure data accuracy and completeness. Most importantly, she/he is responsible for ensuring that primary stakeholders are involved to the fullest extent possible in undertaking M&E.
Qualifications and experience required

- Experience in participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation, training and facilitation, data processing or analysis and computers
- Ability to organise and train staff
- Good contextual knowledge of local issues, community priorities, organisational relationships, social and cultural constraints and realities, and environmental conditions

Data Management Officer(s)

General scope of the job

The data management officer is responsible for ensuring field data is gathered and registered, ensuring the quality of data entered and helping to produce initial statistical analyses.

Organisational relationships

The data management officer reports directly to the M&E officer or, in a decentralised project set-up, to the district/regional M&E officer.

Responsibilities and tasks

The data management officer is responsible for obtaining all data from primary sources as stipulated in the M&E plan and for their collation and analysis at the M&E office. She/He will work alongside primary stakeholders to carry out survey assignments, in accordance with agreed-on procedures and standards. She/He will undertake routine quality control checking of own and others’ work. The post will involve considerable extraction and computer entry of data from field reports, as well as some analysis.

Qualifications and experience required

Secondary school education, sound mathematics and language skills (including knowledge/fluency in local dialects), reliable, careful, honest and sincere work attitude, resourcefulness to operate under frequently trying and isolated field circumstances, and good local knowledge.

E.4 M&E Responsibilities of General Project (and Partner) Staff

Most TORs or job descriptions of general project staff or staff of implementing partners do not include M&E-related clauses. By stipulating certain M&E responsibilities, the project is encouraging all staff to become engaged in the ongoing process of observing, noting and analysing how well the project is doing.

For All Project Staff

General qualifications and experience required

- An interest in training, on-the-job coaching, learning through exchanges and other forms of reflection to contribute to project M&E
- An understanding of the contribution of M&E to ensuring project impact
- Interest in improving M&E skills
Manager(s)

The following applies to various types of project managers, for example, managers of specific project components.

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

- Assist in designing and implementing participatory planning processes and procedures.
- Supervise the generation of local level AWPBs and consolidate into an overall AWPB.
- In consultation with the M&E officer and other management staff and advisors, liaise with primary stakeholders and other staff to ensure a two-way flow of information on implementation.
- With local organisations, identify the support and resources they need for institutional strengthening, including for M&E, and provide follow-up to ensure support is provided.
- Facilitate communication between those carrying out field implementation and decision-makers on the number and quality of activities undertaken for each project component.
- Actively seek to understand problems and unexpected positive/negative impacts, discussing these with primary stakeholders and senior management.
- Assess field reports to determine possible implications for implementation and agree on corrective action with appropriate decision-makers.
- Assist with technical preparation and socio-economic appraisal of activities as well as approval of activities submitted by community groups through local councils or implementing NGOs. Make sure quality standards are adhered to and that plans are accompanied by clarity on how M&E will be undertaken.

Gender Officer/Women’s Development Manager

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

- Support project management and technical staff in incorporating gender issues in the project M&E system (performance questions, indicators, sampling, methods, procedures, analysis of gender-differentiated implementation and impact).
- Liaise closely, continuously and constructively with primary stakeholders, government ministries, local government, potential contractors and other relevant projects to exchange ideas on the gender-sensitive M&E of project activities, processes and impacts.
- Work closely with local women’s groups to identify how they do their own M&E and how this can be linked to project M&E in ways that are safe and appropriate. Identify additional resources and support that will enable their active participation.
- Assist in gender-sensitive participatory planning and support implementation. Ensure women’s issues appear in local plans.
- Facilitate all field staff and project component managers to communicate information from the field to the appropriate decision-making forum on women’s involvement and performance in activities undertaken in all (sub-) components, processes and impacts.
- Ensure that training on and facilitation of M&E processes include awareness of how women and men can contribute equally.
- Arrange for the dissemination of information from M&E data on the degree to which gender-related objectives are being achieved and on the gender-differentiated impact of the project.
Qualifications and experience required

In addition to normal requirements in terms of gender and project management expertise:

- experience in assessing intra-household dynamics and impacts on diverse age/ethnic/social groups;
- experience with integrating gender considerations into M&E processes, both in terms of the type of information being sought and in terms of creating spaces in which gender-related implementation and impact issues can be discussed openly and corrective actions agreed upon.

Financial Controller-Administrator

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

- In collaboration with the relevant national and state authorities, prepare a scheme of accounts that is computerised and provides management information readily to project management and the M&E coordinator.
- Establish systems of in-house accounting for those items of the project expenditure that are incurred directly rather than through contracted operations.
- Support M&E coordinator(s) and officers in implementing expenditure monitoring.
- Prepare routine financial statements for submission to project management and as necessary to external supervising bodies, such as steering committees, boards, etc.
- Assist in the preparation of budgets for the AWPB, as necessary.

Technical Component Officer

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

- Supervise and coordinate field staff in interacting actively with primary stakeholders to learn how to improve implementation on a continual basis.
- Participate in the development, regular revision and updating of the information system so progress with the project component can be monitored, problems identified and its impact assessed accurately.
- Work closely with the M&E officer, gender specialist and field staff to ensure that a feasible and useful M&E process is developed for the component, based on the participation and equity principles of the project.
- Identify what support is needed to undertake good M&E of the component, and ensure this support is forthcoming.
- Supervise the M&E of any contractors that are within the scope of the component.

Communication Specialist

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

- Prepare a communication strategy for the project by assessing the key information dissemination needs of the main stakeholder groups, identifying the most appropriate medium, frequency, audience and content.
• Ensure timely, regular and easily accessible communication, such as quarterly newsletters, radio programmes and bulletin boards, which include up-to-date M&E information and are targeted to the audience.

• Maintain the project Website, including up-to-date M&E information and lessons learned.

• Respond to the wide variety of information requests from stakeholders in the project area, including the media.

• Oversee the preparation, printing and dissemination of documents, including liaising with authors, printers and graphic designers.

• Assist in organising seminars, workshops and other meetings on priority project issues for stakeholders.

• Work with technical staff and management to ensure that information on progress, problems, impacts and lessons learned are stored in the appropriate location for enabling access to the intended user.

• Occasionally assist with the work of short-term consultants, facilitating their access to the information they require.

E.5 M&E Responsibilities of Primary Stakeholder Groups

The type of link between the project and primary stakeholder groups will vary greatly per project. The ideas below do not specify what is needed, for example, for monitoring microcredit groups or local extension activities. Such issues will require further detailing in any agreement between the project, implementing partners and primary stakeholder groups.

General scope of the relationship

The main M&E contribution of primary stakeholder groups is to provide thorough insights into the relevance, quality and impact of project activities, with a special focus on ensuring the participation and voice of women, the poorest, and marginalised social/ethnic groups.

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related)

• Participate actively in M&E design events, particularly by identifying the stakeholder group’s information needs and capacities.

• Negotiate with project staff and implementing partners on what the group will monitor and what support is needed for this to be possible.

• Ensure that the agreements on group M&E responsibilities are fulfilled.

• Actively represent the diversity of the group’s opinions in project-related meetings and events.

• Hold regular local meetings to reflect on project activities and gather opinions on future developments for feedback to project management.

• Ensure that information on project plans are discussed in the group and that local voices are actively present in relevant decision-making processes.

• In all the above, ensure that the diversity in the group is respected by allowing space for women, the poorest, and marginalised social/ethnic groups to make a meaningful contribution.
E.6 TOR for Consultant to Set Up the M&E System

General scope of the job

The M&E consultant will be responsible for establishing and providing ongoing support for implementing the project’s M&E system, in line with IFAD guidelines for M&E.

Organisational relationships

The M&E consultant will be answerable to the project director, with the majority of tasks to be undertaken in collaboration with implementing partners, project staff and, particularly, M&E personnel and primary stakeholder groups to enable a learning process and inclusive decision making and to maximise transparency and accountability. The M&E consultant is expected to work alongside the M&E coordinator, if one has been appointed, but will not have supervisory responsibility in the project. As with all project staff, consultants are accountable to the primary stakeholders of the project.

Operating responsibilities and tasks

Year 1

Note: staffing conditions (quality and quantity) at start-up will determine which of the tasks below are relevant for the consultant to carry out.

• Define the detailed responsibilities of the M&E unit coordinator and the M&E officers.

• At start-up, work closely with project management, including implementing partners and primary stakeholders, to revise the project strategy and logframe.

• At start-up, with key stakeholders, use the revised logframe and project budget to make a detailed design of the M&E system. Include performance questions, information needs, indicators and related targets, methods, sampling procedure and reporting formats and procedures. Ensure that these supplement and link to the existing M&E processes of implementing partners and other stakeholder groups.

• Draw up TORs to initiate the baseline survey, including methodology preparation, sample selection and staff training if required. If coordinating implementation, supervise data entry and provide preliminary analysis of findings.

• Recommend suitable professional M&E training for all staff during years 1 and 2, and provide this training where possible.

• Outline the management information system, define reporting requirements from managers responsible for implementing activities/components and define formats for standard reports (e.g., quarterly and annual reports).

• Install hardware and software for M&E information and arrange for the training of computer operators.

• With the main stakeholders, outline a feasible impact assessment approach that will supplement the M&E of other implementing partners. It will have at least two components: primary stakeholder assessment of project impact and self-assessment by staff (project and implementing partners) of project impact.

• Define the need for specific M&E studies.

• Define how often and how the M&E system will be revised and improved, as well as whose responsibility this is.
• Identify agencies in the public and private sectors with the capabilities and experience relevant for implementing specific ad-hoc M&E studies.

• Ensure that the M&E system is based on a learning orientation and is focused around the needs of the decision-makers to manage for impact. Reach agreement on when reflections and information analysis will take place and with whom.

Intermediate year(s)

• Ensure that M&E activities are appropriate and take account of the evolution of the project and of stakeholders’ needs and capacities.

• Together with those implementing it, identify problems with the M&E system and modify the system, as necessary.

• Provide refresher training on M&E, as necessary.

• Oversee the design and development of mid-term field studies.

• Assess if M&E findings are being used to make decisions and increase project impact. If necessary, identify what can be undertaken to ensure this happens.

• Review the results of completed surveys and assist in report preparation.

• Assist with the mid-term evaluation/review.

• Ensure that staff and implementing partners are receiving adequate support to be able to implement their M&E functions and that data collection and analysis is on schedule and proving useful to the end-users. In consultation with the users, make recommendations for adaptation, if needed.

Final project year

• Assist in the coordination and execution of the completion evaluation. This includes a participatory impact assessment with primary stakeholders, in which lessons learned are identified for a possible next phase or for similar projects elsewhere.

Working conditions and time schedule

Note: for a consultant you will need to decide how many months per year and in which year you will require his/her input. Stipulate that the actual timing of Technical Assistance visits will be decided during the initial input and should be based on project needs. This could look something like: “A total of #person months, covering a six-month period at start-up to execute a baseline survey and monitoring system design; then one month of annual inputs in all subsequent years for relevant support in M&E implementation, refinement and analysis; and a final six-month input for the completion evaluation study”.

Note: stipulate where the consultant will be based. For example, “The consultant will be based at the project coordination office and will also travel to field sites with M&E personnel as required.”
Qualifications and experience required

She/He must have:

- a solid understanding of rural development, with a focus on participatory processes, joint management and gender issues;

- familiarity with and a supportive attitude towards processes of strengthening local organisations and building local capacities for self-management;

- willingness to undertake regular field visits and interact with different stakeholders, especially primary stakeholders;

- computer skills;

- leadership qualities and personnel and team management skills (including mediation and conflict resolution).

She/He must also have:

- a degree in relevant areas, for example, agricultural economics, rural development management;

- a minimum of eight years of professional experience in developing and implementing M&E systems in similar projects;

- proven experience with the logical framework approach and other strategic planning approaches, M&E methods and approaches (including quantitative, qualitative and participatory), training in M&E development and implementation, facilitating learning-oriented analysis sessions of M&E data with multiple stakeholders, information analysis and report writing.

E.7 TOR for Consultant on Participatory M&E

General scope of the job

The main purpose of this consultant is to facilitate the primary stakeholder group and project staff in developing a participatory M&E system that:

- can be handled by primary stakeholders and field staff;

- considers the information needs of project management and implementers;

- generates sufficiently reliable and useful information about economic, socio-cultural and environmental project impact;

- produces information for primary stakeholders that helps them better manage and own the project;

- can be run at minimum cost, replacing less effective elements of the existing M&E system;

- fits well with the existing M&E system of the project, building upon existing experience and capacities and incorporating informal M&E systems already within stakeholder groups.

Organisational relationships

The participatory M&E consultant will be answerable to the project director. The majority of tasks will be undertaken in collaboration with staff of implementing partners – particularly those responsible for M&E – and primary stakeholder groups to enable a learning process,
ensure inclusive decision making and maximise transparency and accountability. The M&E consultant is expected to work closely with the M&E coordinator(s) on participatory M&E issues and without supervisory responsibility in the project. All project staff and consultants are accountable to the primary stakeholders of the project.

**Responsibilities and tasks**

- identify the needs in the project, among staff, implementing partners and primary stakeholders, with regard to developing more participatory forms of M&E.

- Work with project staff and implementing partners to identify what can be changed and how this can best be undertaken, and to make the learning processes more inclusive of primary stakeholders and other relevant groups.

- Work with primary stakeholders to develop locally relevant indicators and methods that allow impact assessment and contribute to the institutional strengthening of their organisations.

- As necessary, prepare and train staff, primary stakeholders and implementing partners on reflective learning events, participatory monitoring and/or participatory impact assessment including any methodological training and piloting of methods, data collection techniques, data processing and information analysis.

**Specific responsibilities related to primary stakeholder self-evaluation**

- Work closely with primary stakeholder groups to identify purpose of self-evaluation, key information needs, methods and formats for data collection and analysis.

- If necessary, develop a communication strategy for sharing M&E results with others.

- Discuss with staff how self-evaluation results are to feed into ongoing assessments and the organisational development of the project.

- Document results and main elements of the approach, with project staff.

- Provide training, if desirable, for those responsible among the primary stakeholders and the project staff or implementing partners for guiding the self-evaluation process.

- Develop appropriate support material with primary stakeholders.

**Qualifications and experience required**

- Similar to E.5, but at least four years of experience with participatory planning and M&E processes are also needed.

- Good communication and facilitation skills.
E.8 TOR for Consultant on Information Management

General scope of the job

The main contribution of this consultant will be to develop the main tools for data collection, recording and management in ways that are locally feasible, enable as much open access to information as possible and are flexible enough to allow updating as information needs evolve.

Organisational relationships

The consultant will be answerable to the project director, with tasks to be undertaken with relevant implementing partners, project staff - particularly those with M&E functions - and primary stakeholder groups to enable a learning process, ensure inclusive decision making and maximise transparency and accountability. The consultant will be expected to work closely with the M&E coordinator(s) and will not have supervisory responsibility in the project. All project staff and consultants are accountable to the primary stakeholders of the project.

Responsibilities and tasks

- Base recommendations for and implementation of systems for information management on the existing M&E system or plans. She/He will do this by assessing the current state of project M&E and of performance questions and indicators, the objective hierarchy and assumptions, and by considering who is using/will use this information.
- Revise the information needs of all key stakeholders that need to be integrated into the local database.
- Refine, if necessary, the methods for regular information collection and for special studies arising from project needs.
- Reach agreement on where data will be entered, who will have access and who will provide statistical analysis (where and when).
- Define the principal automated outputs that the system should provide, based on funding agency and ministry requirements (and related to results, objectives, impact, lessons learned and corrective actions needed/taken).
- Define the choice of software according to database requirements, degree of user-friendliness, possibilities of updating the database and the technical facilities available in the field.
- Develop recommendations and TOR for additional information specialists to maintain the database.
- Make # (to be agreed with project director) return visits to the project to review information management and make adjustments, as necessary.
- If necessary, install hardware and software for M&E information and arrange for training of computer operators.

Qualifications and experience required

- Computer/Data processing specialisation, with at least five years of experience setting up and maintaining management information systems in rural development projects.
E.9 TOR for Implementing Partner (M&E Component Only)

General scope of the job
The main M&E role of the implementing partners will be to ensure that the component/activity for which they are responsible is adequately monitored in a timely fashion, based on active participation of local groups and continual corrective actions to improve impact.

Organisational relationships
The implementing partner will be answerable to the project director and will work closely with project technical staff and M&E staff to ensure M&E increases impact. It will be accountable, in terms of its work, to the primary stakeholders with whom it is working.

Responsibilities and tasks (M&E-related and focusing on the component for which the implementing partner is responsible)

- Work closely with project director to organise a start-up workshop with stakeholders, especially primary stakeholders, during which the learning-oriented and participatory nature of M&E is discussed.

- Work with the M&E coordinator/project director on developing the M&E system via a process in which (representatives of) primary stakeholders make a critical contribution.

- Understand existing M&E needs and processes among primary stakeholders and integrate these with project M&E needs and processes to form one complementary project M&E system.

- Work closely with primary stakeholders and project M&E staff to initiate and guide the process of transferring M&E to local organisations, providing required support to strengthen capacities.

- Facilitate learning exchanges and information dissemination between project coordination and primary stakeholders, working with other projects, funding agencies and government ministries.

- Fulfil all contractual requirements in terms of M&E data gathering, analysis, report writing and the extent and quality of participatory processes.

- Participate in special evaluation studies, supervision missions and external evaluations as agreed at the onset of the project.
E.10 TOR for Mid-Term Review

General scope

A mid-term review (MTR) will assess operational aspects, such as project management and implementation of activities and also the extent to which objectives are being fulfilled. It will focus on corrective actions needed for the project to achieve impact. It will be a decisive review to evaluate whether a project should be continued to a second phase.

Organisational relationships

The MTR team leader will be answerable to the funding agency (and possibly the cooperating institution) and will work closely with the project director, implementing partner management and M&E staff to design and undertake the review. The project will provide key background documentation to the team (project appraisal report, president report and recommendations, supervision mission reports, any progress reports, M&E reports and special studies, background information on the project area, etc.).

Responsibilities and tasks

- Before starting, be thoroughly familiar with the project (objectives, outputs, previous phases including previous activities, outputs, problems, budget time schedule, context, etc.).
- Consult with the project director on how the review mission will be best conducted, how implementing partners, project staff and primary stakeholders will be involved, what the timetable is for fieldwork and reporting, and how feedback on the conclusions will be organised.
- Agree with project management and funding agencies on the methodology of the review, in terms of: (1) the level of participation vis-à-vis management of the process, data collection, data analysis, drawing conclusions/supplying recommendations and giving reactions to draft conclusions and (2) the methodology to be followed (sequence of workshops, seminars, interviews, questionnaires, participatory techniques, etc.).
- Agree what the MTR will address, for example, the relevance of the project to local development priorities and needs; clarity and feasibility of project objectives (including targets); prospects for sustainability; quality and adequacy of project strategy (including logical consistency, clarity of assumptions and risks, quality of external relationships, cost-effectiveness; and the quality of participatory processes and support to strengthening local organisations.

Note: the elements below are commonly found in MTRs but will vary per MTR.

- Per component, assess physical progress, efficiency and adequacy, in terms of delivery of project inputs and outputs.
- Per component, analyse financial progress. Assess whether the use of project funds is commensurate with the attainment of physical progress, efficacy and the timeliness of procurement and disbursement activities.
- Assess the efficiency of project organisation and management with respect to its size and composition, organisational structure, personnel management and policy, the qualifications of local staff and consultants, reporting, effectiveness of the M&E system (in defining performance indicators and collecting and analysing monitoring data on project progress) and follow-up on primary stakeholders’ reactions to project activities.
• Assess the relevance and effectiveness of technical assistance and training given to primary stakeholders and staff in relation to design objectives, and the extent to which they have been given based on needs assessment and followed up on to determine their impact.

• Assess the quality of cooperation with institutions and effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, with respect to composition and membership of coordination committees, and contribution to timely decision making and problem solving. Changes in project design in this respect will be thoroughly assessed.

• Assess degree of compliance with loan agreement.

• Analyse which factors and constraints have influenced project implementation, including technical, managerial, organisational, institutional and socio-economic policy issues, in addition to other external factors unforeseen during design.

• Assess project results and impacts, in terms of development outcomes, based on the project’s actual and potential development impact on the primary stakeholder groups, relevant institutions and wider context. This includes identifiable benefits for primary stakeholders – including wider livelihood and capacity-building – in terms of depth, spread and gender, primary stakeholder participation and environmental concerns.

• Assess the prospects of the local primary and secondary stakeholders and host institutions for sustaining impacts after termination of the project, taking into account old and new assumptions and risks.

• Make an overall assessment of project cost effectiveness.

• Identify where project design needs adjusting/reorienting in order to increase its effectiveness in reaching the target groups. This includes proposals to adjust the project objectives and strategy, activities, budget and inputs, organisational/institutional set-up and implementation plan.

• Assess the performance of funding and supervising agencies in terms of quality of supervision, efficiency in loan administration, ability to anticipate problems and extend implementation support, adequacy of reporting, recommendations and effectiveness of follow-up on recommendations. Identify how this has affected project performance.

• Produce a clear set of lessons learned that can benefit the project in its remaining lifespan.

**Qualifications and experience required**

The MTR team should include diverse professional expertise (various disciplines) and methodological skills (local development, empowerment, experience with MTRs, workshop facilitation, participatory research, gender competence, etc.) as well as knowledge of the region/country.
A GUIDE FOR PROJECT M&E

ANNEX E

List of Booklets in the Guide

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Section 3. Linking Project Design, Annual Planning and M&E
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Annex A. Glossary of M&E Concepts and Terms
Annex B. Annotated Example of a Project Logframe Matrix and Logframe Explanation (relates to Section 3)
Annex C. Annotated Example of an M&E Matrix (relates to Section 5)
Annex D. Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (relates to Sections 3, 6 and 8)
Annex E. Sample Job Descriptions and Terms of Reference for Key M&E Tasks (relates to Section 7)