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Module 1: Introduction to the Designing and Implementing M&E Systems Course

Session 1: Introduction to Designing and Implementing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Course

The content of these videos are aimed to provide some of the foundations for understanding key concepts and principles in establishing a monitoring and evaluation systems, including the approach of results based management. It is intended that the information contained within this series will be complemented in the future by in-class training by selected resource people.

The original content of this training is drawn from AKF's Facilitator's Guide on Designing and Implementing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems.

Specifically, the objectives of this training are to:

- Develop an understanding of the guiding principles of sound monitoring and evaluation systems
- Develop a basic understanding of how to use Results Based Management to develop robust monitoring and evaluation systems
- Develop an understanding of how to strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems in our units

By the end of this online course it is expected that you will be able to :

- Understand the difference between monitoring and evaluation
- Understand the ten steps in establishing a monitoring and evaluation system
- Understand how to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan

The course is organized into six modules.

- Module 1: Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation, Designing and Implementing Monitoring & Evaluation Systems
- Module 2: Defining Results and Results Based Management
- Module 3: How to Know Change has Happened - Developing and Selecting Indicators



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- Module 4: How to Collect Information including Data Sources, Methodologies, Frequency and Responsibilities
- Module 5: Articulating and Monitoring Assumptions and Risks, Grouping Indicators and Developing Output Monitoring Tools

Finally, Module 6 will provide an overview of the course.

Each module and associated sessions follows a similar format and is organized in the following way:

- The session content
- Additional resources on selected topics to explore further on your own
- A quiz at the end of the module to see if you've understood the content
- Instructions for a self-directed exercise to apply your new learning; and

As with any training course there are limitations to the amount of material that can be covered.

The content of this training does not go into detail beyond Step 6 of designing a monitoring and evaluation System.

It also does not cover topics related to data collection through non-routine methods such as surveys, focus groups discussions or individual interviews. Nor, does it focus on baselines and establishing targets.

Wherever possible, additional resources are provided to explore these topics independently.

Now, let's get started. Click on Session 2 in this module to begin your journey into designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems.



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Session 2: Monitoring and Evaluation Concepts

Welcome to the first module of designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems. In this session, we'll explore the basic concepts of monitoring and evaluation, and the difference and the relationship between the two.

At the end of this session, it is expected that you will be able to define the concepts of monitoring and evaluation. You will also be able to identify what makes each concept distinct from the other.

Monitoring is defined as the systematic collection of data for selected indicators to demonstrate the extent of progress, the achievement of results and the use of allocated funds.

Monitoring is an on-going and systematic process which takes place throughout the project cycle.

It emphasises learning by doing and using information and evidence to inform decisions.

Monitoring is also a way to demonstrate progress against expected results. This means going beyond simply the tracking of activities and resources. But collecting data and information to track progress and changes.

In monitoring, we ask the question “are we making progress?”

Monitoring processes need to be coordinated between all sectors in a programme. This includes collaboration between sectors working in health, education, rural development and civil society, in the collection of information so that it is relevant to the organisation as a whole.

It is also important to remember that monitoring involves all staff in the programme including monitoring and evaluation staff and programme staff and is not done by one person or group alone. It involves everyone.

Overall, Monitoring is integrated into everything we do.

Evaluation on the other hand, is defined as the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. Its aim is to determine the relevancy, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

Evaluations can take place at various points during the programme lifespan.

Evaluations contribute to organizational learning and continuous improvement of approaches and strategies. They are essential to informing learning and making adjustments to future projects and programmes



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Evaluations go beyond simply stating the progress on results, but also the way in which the program was delivered and effectiveness in how resources were utilised

Evaluation asks the questions have we done the right thing, how can it be done better and what overall change has occurred?

As you may have noticed, there are several differences between monitoring and evaluation. These differences are mainly in their frequency, main actions, overall purpose, focus, types of questions it aims to answer and who is typically responsible for each.

Let's go through each of the areas and see the differences.

Monitoring is continuous and regular throughout the project or programme cycle. Evaluations on the other hand are typically periodic and happen at specific intervals such as at the mid-term or end of the project or programme.

The main action in monitoring is the collection of routine data, analysing this data and using the information to inform decisions. In evaluation the analysis is more in-depth

The overall purpose of monitoring is to demonstrate results and learning. It also informs decision making during implementation. On the other hand, evaluation assesses what has been achieved overall and how it has been achieved.

In terms of focus, monitoring looks at the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, risks and environment. Evaluation focuses on overall effectiveness (including results), efficiency, reach, impact and sustainability.

Monitoring answers the questions, 'are we making progress? What has been achieved? And, What are we learning? Evaluation on the other hand asks, "Have we done the right things? How can it be done better? And, "What has been the overall change?"

Finally, there are differences in who is generally responsible for monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is undertaken by project managers, monitoring and evaluation staff, field staff, partners and even the community. Evaluation on the other hand is generally not conducted by those implementing the program, but rather by external evaluators or donors.

Now that we have briefly reviewed what monitoring and evaluation is and the differences between the two, let's explore monitoring a bit further by asking the question, "What do we monitor?"

We monitor many things throughout the project and programme cycle. These include:

- The completion of activities - Have we done what we said we would do?



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- Time - How long it has taken to complete activities versus what was planned
- Resources – What resources are we using?
- Assumptions - What assumptions are in place and is the logic of our strategies correct?
- Risks - What are the risks in achieving our results; and
- Results Achieved - What changes and results have been achieved, including changes in gender equality?"

Why do we monitor? We monitor for three main reasons – accountability, learning and decision making. Let's explore each one individually.

The first reason for monitoring is for accountability. There is upward accountability and downward accountability.

Upward accountability is to donors or the board of directors. Downward accountability is to targeted communities, other organizations and our partners.

This means that the data gathered through monitoring is disseminated upwards to donors or the board and downwards to communities, organizations and partners.

The second reason to monitor is for learning. Monitoring for learning helps us to identify the changes, if any and identify strengths and weaknesses of our interventions and to be able to learn from them in order to make adjustments and improve our programmes based on information that is collected. In other words decision making – the third reason to monitor regularly.

Monitoring therefore is done both for external audiences and internal learning and decision making. What is important to remember is that everyone within the organization is part of this process and it must be integrated into the organizational culture.

Congratulations. You have completed Session 2 on the concepts and definitions of monitoring and evaluation. In our next session, we will look at the ten steps in establishing a monitoring and evaluation system.

For further information and additional resources on monitoring and evaluation concepts, click on on the resources section for this session.



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Session 3: Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation System (Part 1)

Welcome to Session 3 – Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation System. In this session we will review the first six steps involved in establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system.

At the end of this session it is expected that you will be familiar with some of the steps involved in establishing a monitoring and evaluation system. It is also expected that you will become more comfortable with establishing or strengthening existing systems in your own programme and unit

A monitoring and evaluation system is defined as a system for collecting and utilizing information on the progress of a project or programme.

We collect and utilize this information with the overall goal of improving the project or programme.

The purpose of establishing a monitoring and evaluation system is to have a structured framework in order to systematically plan what data is collected. When it is collected. How often it is collected. How we will collect it. How we will analyze the data, and finally how we will use it to inform decision making.

It is important to keep in mind also that this system serves as a communication system in order to disseminate information both upwards and downwards to various stakeholders.

That it focuses on the programme level and not just individual projects.

That it is not simply a management information system, but the overall plan and the steps taken to implement this plan.

Overall a monitoring and evaluation system is not a standalone framework, but one which is integrated into the organizational structure and processes.

There are generally ten steps in establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system.

During the course of the next few slides, we will review each of these steps briefly.

Our next module will go into more detail about some of these steps so don't worry if you have missed something.

Before beginning however it is important to note that a successful M&E system is only possible when there is:

- Commitment and priority from management to monitoring and evaluation
- The available financial resources for data collection, analysis and reporting



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- The available human resources such as time and technical capacity of monitoring and evaluation staff
- There is a shared understanding of the importance of a systematic process in informing decisions and learning; and
- A clear and updated programme strategy which the monitoring and evaluation system can be built on

Now, let's review each of the steps briefly.

In Step One we ask the question, "what does change look like?"

This involves determining the change (or the result) we expect to see as a result of our activities, strategies and interventions. It is important to remember that changes are never gender neutral and so we also look at gender equality implications. Also do not forget to think through environmental implications where relevant.

It also involves determining the strategic priorities for the programme such as national sectoral development plans, country unit strategies and others.

Practically speaking, this step involves the development of a results framework

In step two we ask, "how do we know that change has actually happened?"

It is in this step that we select or develop indicators to measure outcomes and those to monitor outputs, activities, inputs and risks.

Step three involves the collection of data to inform our indicators.

It is in here that we determine how data will be collected, from where this data will come. Deciding who will collect, analyse and report on the data. And when the data for each indicator will be collected.

Step four is articulating risks and assumptions. Here we identify the assumptions of the programme, identify the potential internal and external risks that would prevent the programme from achieving its expected results, including the risks associated with achieving gender equality results. Practically speaking, in this step we develop our risk management and monitoring matrix.

The next step involves grouping our indicators to determine which ones can be collected at the same time by the same person and ideally using the same tools.

In this step we also map the indicators we will collect in periodic studies.



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Step six is when we design data collection tools, primarily for output monitoring. Pre-test these tools and collect our routine monitoring data.

Here we also design any study tools, where relevant, and test them as well.

Up until this point, we have reviewed briefly steps one to six in establishing a monitoring and evaluation system. In the next session we will continue with step 7 to 10 of establishing a monitoring and evaluation system.



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Session 4: Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation System (Part II)

Welcome to Session 4 – The second part in establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation System. In the previous video we reviewed steps 1 to 6 of the M&E system. In this session we will continue with our review of steps 7 to 10.

Step seven of the M&E system involves data collection and management.

In this step, we:

- Collect routine data for our outputs, activities and even some of our outcomes.
- Collect or identify our baseline data
- Determine targets based on baseline data collected
- Collect periodic data through studies. These studies can partly be outsourced depending on what level data is being collected or the internal capacity and resources available in the organization
- Ensure Data Quality. Specifically the Reliability, Validity, and Timeliness of data collection; and
- During this phase, we also ensure that data is cleaned, entered and managed appropriately with databases and archiving systems.

The last three steps in the system establishment - Step 8, 9 and 10 are generally when assessment, evaluation and learning take place.

Step 8 for instance, is the step in which we analyze our data and examine the trends and meaning behind the data that has been collected in previous steps.

This analysis can be done internally or externally depending on the complexity of data

In step 9, we interpret this data, compile the data and present the analysed data in a clear and coherent way. This is done through the presentation of data on graphs or in tables depending on which audiences we are trying to reach.

In the interpretation of data, the timeframes used are important and reporting on data in a timely way is critical. The timeframes uses must also be communicated when reporting findings.

It is in the final step that we use the data to inform learning.

Specifically we:

- Use findings for learning and to improve performance
- Communicate the findings to external audiences



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- Make adjustments and adopt lessons for future programming
- These are done to ensure accountability to all stakeholders

In summary, establishing and implementing an M&E system involves ten steps as we have seen in Part 1 and Part 2 of these videos.

Each of these steps takes time and requires the commitment and priority from the unit.

In order to ensure the success of a useful monitoring and evaluation system, there are several factors that are needed:

- Readiness – do we have the necessary human and financial resources available
- Ownership – do the critical people see the need for the system? Do they have a say in building the system?
- Management and maintenance – do we have the competent skills and financial resources to manage and maintain the system?
- Utilization of information – is the right amount of data being collected? Is there too much data that is not being used to inform results and learning?
- Quality of information – is the data reliable and does it measure the intended results. And Finally
- Sustainability – if there is a change in leadership or staff in monitoring units? Will the system continue to function without them?

Congratulations. You have completed Session 4 on the ten steps for establishing an M&E system. You have also successfully completed Module 1 of this course.

For further information and additional resources on establishing monitoring and evaluation systems, click on the resources section for this session.

Also, click on the quiz for this session to test your knowledge on the concepts we have reviewed in this module.