

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) minimum standards

TOOL 15

Your programme teams in access-constrained contexts will often struggle with data quality when measuring results. Two principal data quality concerns in these contexts include data validity and data integrity. Your measurements may be invalid (i.e. available sources of evidence do not represent what you are intending to measure) due to constraints to sources of evidence or your data collection methods. You may also have data integrity concerns as data flows and information management processes are vulnerable to manipulation given the distances involved, staff capacity, security challenges, and other factors. These data quality concerns limit your organisation's ability to confirm deliverables, improve programmes and measure the change your organisation may have contributed to.

They also exacerbate three risks for your organisation:

- ❶ **Reputational/operational:** your organisation's reputation, and its ability to raise funds, negotiate access and advocate, will be undermined if programmes are not delivering value to beneficiaries;
- ❷ **Financial:** your organisation may not have the documentation necessary to meet donor requirements, which could lead to disallowed costs;
- ❸ **Do no harm:** programs could put beneficiaries or staff at risk, increase tensions in communities, or do harm in other ways

Your organisation's staff responsible for programming in access-constrained contexts can use creative methods and sources of evidence to mitigate threats to data quality. The M&E minimum standards is a tool to measure if these efforts are likely to be successful when applied to output indicators. The results allow your organisation to measure confidence in the monitoring data, particularly in areas where direct access is often impossible.

M&E MINIMUM STANDARDS – DOMAINS

These M&E minimum standards divide remote monitoring activities and methods into six domains. The domains complement and compensate for each other. If activities in one domain are impossible, more effort in other domains may compensate. The six domains are:

- 1 Triangulation:** Multiple sources of evidence on the same indicator can be used together to give more confidence to any findings. This may include process data such as waybills, goods-received notes or workflow documentation. In many instances, it includes mixing research methods to pose the same question to different people and groups in different ways. For example, your survey about latrine use may be triangulated with a focus group discussion and photos of the latrines. Triangulation mitigates both integrity and validity threats.
- 2 Data chain of custody:** How your teams in the field capture and transmit data to project management staff can reduce or increase data-quality vulnerabilities. Mobile data capture can ensure that data is digitally captured, with time, date and location stamped, and tagged with the identity of the person collecting and transmitted it directly and immediately to a secure server. This reduces the opportunity for mistakes or manipulation when data is entered, aggregated, and reported and provides an opportunity for you to conduct data audits and spot-checks. This data can include surveys, distribution documentation, photos, attendance reports and other monitoring processes. Efforts in this domain mitigate data integrity threats.
- 3 Population-based surveys and sampling methodologies:** Outcome monitoring processes return to the recipients of assistance to learn how they made use of your organisation's support. Using commonly accepted statistical methods to establish robust sample sizes and methods for including individuals in the sample will ensure that these processes reflect objective reality rather than the opinion of key individuals. The correct use of these methods mitigates data validity and integrity threats.
- 4 Beneficiary initiated feedback:** Where feedback handling mechanisms exist and function, they provide a robust accountability control for your organisation's programs. These channels may include email, SMS, WhatsApp, phone calls, and/or complaint boxes. An important element of a feedback system is ensuring that beneficiaries understand their entitlement. Feedback systems that exist on paper, but have not resulted in registered feedback, do not give your programme teams the same confidence. A functioning feedback handling mechanism mitigates validity and integrity threats by serving as an alternative source of evidence and a deterrent to manipulation.
- 5 Independence:** Having an independent look at implementation is highly desirable, but very challenging in a remote-management context. In many contexts, your organisation's senior staff and your donors can provide an independent verification of results with ad hoc visits and spot-checks. However, in areas that are difficult to access, this can be quite challenging or even impossible. You could consider contracting local third-party monitoring firms or other 'independent' monitors; however, these monitors must negotiate their access through the same constraints as your organisation and often rely on the same pool of last-mile staff, and the independence of these external monitors cannot be assumed. Independent data collection mitigates data integrity threats.
- 6 Documented direct contact with beneficiaries:** Direct contact with beneficiaries may be documented at the moment of handover or service deliver and again during an outcome monitoring process. In some challenging contexts, your distributions may occur quickly and without documentation; or your local partners may engage with beneficiaries but provide only summary reports to your organisation. Your organisation's ability to review the primary data documenting beneficiary engagement mitigates data integrity threats.

SCORING THE M&E MINIMUM STANDARDS

The questions in the table below evaluate an activity against the six domains of the M&E minimum standards and provides a score. The score gives your management a measure of the confidence they can have in the reported output results.

Instructions

Facilitation by your organisation's M&E staff or another group external to the implementation team, if possible, can promote a more reflective and independent assessment. Fill the tool at the activity level. Consider related output and outcome indicators together as one monitoring process. Fill the tool for each different implementation modality. For example, if an food distribution is conducted house-to-house in one location and at a centralized distribution point in another location, fill the tool for each modality. Give each question a 'yes' or 'no'. A 'yes' is awarded only when the method is available or implemented 3/4 of the time or more. Partial points are not possible.

In some cases, the six domains look at different aspects of the same monitoring activity. For example, outcome monitoring may contribute to triangulation, direct contact with beneficiaries and population-based surveys. However, in some contexts an outcome monitoring process may only achieve points in one or two of these domains. For example, if your outcome monitoring relies on direct observation, there may not be points for population-based surveys or documented direct contact with beneficiaries.

When you calculate the score before implementation, you should consider concrete plans and commitments to move forward. The results can inform a programme criticality decision, where your management decides if a programme can move forward or not. The results will also become part of the programme documentation to share with donors, internal management and others.

When the score is calculated after implementation, your team should review the primary data supporting each domain. The score is the measure of confidence your organisation can have that the programme existed. This is an important metric for future audits. Comparing the before and after scores will improve how your teams use the tool in the future.

Minimum Score

A suggested minimum score is 57 for life-saving programming and 84 for other types of programming. Your teams should go beyond the minimum whenever the context allows.

M&E MINIMUM STANDARDS

META data	
Date the tool was completed	
Country	
Sector and activity	
Location	
Completed before or after implementation?	

Remote monitoring approach domain	Value	Explanation	Response (Yes)
Documented direct contact with beneficiaries	20		
Is evidence of outputs documented at the point of delivery or handover to the beneficiary?	13	This is the primary source of verification for the relevant output indicator profile. The objective here is to capture the transaction of providing the good or service. For distributions, this is signed beneficiary lists. For services delivered to groups, it could be signed attendance lists or photos showing all attendees receiving the service.	
Is there documented direct contact with beneficiaries providing evidence of outcomes?	7	This is the primary source of verification for the relevant outcome indicator profile. Most often it will be a population-based outcome survey. However, it may also be key-informant interviews with only a few beneficiaries.	
Documented direct contact with beneficiaries:		Section score:	
Triangulation	20		
Are two independent sources of evidence of the activity available?	12	Registration documentation, distribution photos, post-distribution monitoring (PDM) data, etc. For sources of evidence to be independent of each other, they must have very distinct methods (e.g. photos and registration) or be separated in time (e.g. PDM and registration). A registration and exit interviews conducted at the time of distribution would not be independent. Sources of evidence must demonstrate the scale and the nature of the assistance. For a distribution of 1,000 food baskets, photos would need to show 1,000 people receiving the basket and some images of the basket contents, a registration document would need 1,000 names and the content of the basket, etc.	
Are three independent sources of evidence available?	8		
Triangulation:		Section score:	

Remote monitoring approach domain	Value	Explanation	Response (Yes)
Data chain of custody	20		
Is the data transmitted from the field to the project management team via a mobile data capture platform or deposited directly into a file sharing application controlled by your organisation?	2	The objective is for the data to be transmitted from your field team to the project management team via a secure method as early in the data processing flow as possible.	
Is the data entered into a mobile data capture platform at the point of capture?	14	The point of capture is the interview, the observation, when the photo is taken, etc.	
Data chain of custody:		Section score:	
Population-based surveys and sampling	20		
Is the confidence interval 5 or less and the confidence level 95% or greater?	6		
Is the confidence interval 5 or less and the confidence level 90% or greater?	6		
Are those in the sample randomly selected with an approved randomisation method?	8	Consult internal sampling guidance or external resources and tools.	
Population-based surveys and sampling:		Section score:	
Beneficiary initiated feedback	20		
Are all beneficiaries informed of their entitlement from this specific activity?	7	This may be with posters, radio announcements, or other communication.	
Is there one independent feedback channel?	2	This may be WhatsApp, SMS, calling, complaint boxes, etc. Beneficiaries reaching out to the implementation team with feedback does not count as a channel for this exercise.	

Remote monitoring approach domain	Value	Explanation	Response (Yes)
Are there two independent feedback channels?	3	This may be WhatsApp, SMS, calling, complaint boxes, etc. Beneficiaries reaching out to the implementation team with feedback does not count as a channel for this exercise.	
Does your organisation have a history of receiving feedback from beneficiaries of that partner/team in that location?	8	Has one actionable piece of feedback been formally submitted to your organisation relating to work done by your team in this location?	
Beneficiary initiated feedback:		Section score:	
Independence	70		
Do certain senior managers visit the project location unannounced and at will?	25	'At will' means that access does not require special permissions or approval and that physical access is not overly onerous (e.g. driving less than four hours from a major airport). Senior staff should be those based outside the implementation area.	
Do any senior managers visit the project location unannounced and at will?	25	Are visas or access permission only available for certain individuals? If so, then this is a no.	
Do junior or locally based staff visit the project location unannounced and at will?	3		
Is the data collected by staff who are not on the implementation team? This may be another team, another partner or a contracted monitoring party.	3	Was there a segregation of duties for the M&E data collection so that one team did the implementation and another team collected the data?	
Is the data collected without the involvement of local authorities or the implementation team in the field?	14	Remote management often means that last-mile enumerators must negotiate access through the same gatekeepers as the implementation team or have the implementation team introduce them to beneficiaries. This is a 'yes' only if the data collection is truly independent of local authorities and implementers.	
Independence:		Section score:	
Total score:			