Monitoring and Evaluation in Sport for Development
Contents

1. Introduction .................................. 3
2. streetfootballworld and inFocus .......... 4
3. The Importance of M&E ..................... 5
4. M&E Basics .................................. 7
   4.1 Monitoring .................................. 7
   4.2 Evaluation .................................. 7
   4.3 Key Terms .................................. 8
   4.4 External Evaluations, Research and M&E 9
5. Holistic M&E .................................. 10
   5.1 Theory of Change ........................... 11
   5.2 Indicators .................................. 12
   5.3 Data Collection .............................. 14
   5.4 Data Management ........................... 15
   5.5 Learning and Improving .................... 15
   5.6 Accountability and Reporting ............ 16
   5.7 Overall M&E Coordination ............... 16
6. Taking a Closer Look ......................... 17
   6.1 Theory of Change ........................... 17
   6.2 Data Collection .............................. 19
   6.3 Learning ................................... 23
7. Challenges and Pitfalls ..................... 26
Bibliography ................................... 27

CREDITS

Written by: Katrin Elsemann, Maja Hebel, Leena Jäger, Catherine Daraspe
Produced by: streetfootballworld
Photo on front page by Alice Keeney, Grassroot Soccer
1. Introduction

In recent years, the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has grown dramatically in the social development sector, as competition for funding increases and funders grow ever more demanding in their requirements for impact measurement.

Sport for development organisations work with people in some of the most deprived areas around the world to tackle pressing social issues. Yet the success stories of programmes aiming to change attitudes, knowledge or behaviour of children or young people often remain untold. Although some organisations attempt to measure whether they are indeed achieving the change they set out to achieve, the broader sport for development sector still struggles to prove the impact of its programmes.

Three main problems prevent the widespread adoption of effective M&E practices:

- A lack of a well-defined programme theory
- A lack of M&E expertise
- A lack of effective processes and practical / affordable tools

The following will outline the key principles and core elements of a strong M&E model for community based organisations.
2. streetfootballworld and inFocus

streetfootballworld is the leading network in the field of social change through football and unites organisations throughout the world which use football as a tool to empower young people.

By connecting network members to partners from the worlds of sport, business, politics and philanthropy, streetfootballworld brings global support to sustainable local initiatives. More information can be found here: www.streetfootballworld.org

The document at hand is based on inFocus. inFocus was conceived when three leading organisations – Aqumen, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and streetfootballworld – realised there was a widespread need for organisations within the sport for development community and in the wider social development sector to better assess the impact of their work and to understand what works and what does not.

inFocus is a holistic M&E support package which provides training, customised support and data management software for organisations to build their capacity.

inFocus helps organisations to not only improve their programmes and increase their impact and efficiency, but also to communicate the real power of their programmes to the world.

1 For more information, please visit impactinfocus.com
3. The Importance of M&E

Many organisations have at least basic M&E tools in place to produce reports for their funders. However, M&E activities are often limited to collecting output information, e.g. the number of participants or attendance in a programme, and are still perceived by many as an effort to solely fulfil reporting requirements for partners and funders. Few organisations use M&E findings for their own learning purposes.

1. Learning and Improving

The main aim of M&E should be internal learning, which is promoted through a learning culture within an organisation that encourages staff, volunteers and stakeholders to understand how programmes are changing people’s lives.

“Promoting a learning culture in organisations”

Organisations using sport as a tool to address social issues in their communities, and specifically among youth, are eager to understand what works well and what does not in order to continuously improve their programmes. They have often collected countless stories to share from participants, which reflect how their programmes have positively influenced or promoted opportunities for individuals or groups of children. A problem these organisations frequently struggle with is how to systematically capture, analyse and learn from the successes and challenges of their programmes. A holistic M&E system helps to shed light on underlying assumptions and assess the impact a programme actually has on its participants. Regular impact assessments enable organisations to identify and address potential gaps in their programmes, and to adapt their future plans accordingly.

The most important reasons for integrating M&E into an organisation should be:

- To learn & improve programme delivery
- To report and be accountable to stakeholders
- To communicate impact
2. Reporting and Accountability

An organisation should be able to provide accurate and timely reports to funders and other stakeholders, e.g. partners or parents. An integrated M&E system will ensure that data and relevant information are regularly collected, stored and analysed, which will enable the organisation to generate reports without much additional effort. The integration of the M&E system into daily operations will improve the overall accountability of the organisation.

3. Communicating Impact

Measuring impact and then communicating it effectively to stakeholders is vital to ensuring accountability and transparency. In this regard, a sound M&E system can equate to more than just reporting on programmes and activities. Funders are especially interested in seeing more than the numbers of beneficiaries and are increasingly asking for the impact of programmes and activities on health or educational outcomes. Proving real impact, such as relating to the beneficiaries’ behaviour changes or attitudes, is not an easy task. However, a comprehensive M&E system should be in place and make sure to measure the expected changes.

Sharing challenges and imperfections is as equally important as talking about successes, as long as the learning and necessary future modifications from these challenges are equally addressed.
4. M&E Basics

The following chapter will provide definitions of key terms used within M&E systems. It will also carve out the differences between external research studies and internal M&E procedures, and discuss the possible advantages and disadvantages of these types of evaluations.

4.1 Monitoring

Monitoring is “the periodic oversight of the implementation of an activity, which seeks to establish the extent to which input deliveries, work schedules, other required actions and targeted outputs are proceeding according to plan, so that timely action can be taken to correct deficiencies detected. Monitoring is also useful for the systematic checking in a condition or set of conditions, such as following the situation of children participating in sport.”

UNICEF, 1991

Monitoring means regularly collecting data within a programme, and then using this information to conduct a basic analysis of the programme’s progress. Monitoring should be an integral part of the operations carried out by the programme staff. This process can help to identify whether the goals of the programme are being achieved. It also serves as a project management tool, keeping the project on track and working as an early warning system if things are not going as planned. Monitoring creates an important basis for future evaluations.

4.2 Evaluation

While monitoring should be a day-to-day activity, evaluation is a periodic and detailed analysis of a programme to assess and determine what worked well and what could be improved, while also offering a framework for learning to help inform the future planning of a programme.

Evaluation is “the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results.”

OECD, 2002

“The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision–making processes for both recipients and donors.

Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy or programme. An assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention.” (OECD, 2002)
4.3 Key Terms

**Assumptions** are underlying beliefs of an organisation’s programme theory. They specify how and why an organisation assumes its activities and programmes will contribute to the intended objectives, e.g., “by educating young people about HIV/AIDS, their attitudes and behaviours will change and ultimately the infection rate will decrease.” They also describe other possible (internal or external) factors and/or risks that could affect the progress or success of a programme. Assumptions need to be tested and verified because they are only hypotheses.

**Activities** are actions or interventions that are meant to produce specific outputs, e.g., an HIV/AIDS awareness event. In order to be able to perform this activity it is important to clarify what input, i.e. which financial, human and material resources are needed. For example, the input required to implement the HIV/AIDS awareness event, includes three staff members, ten volunteers, 50 jerseys and 500 USD.

The **output** of an activity is its immediate result, e.g. 50 young people were tested for HIV and 150 condoms were distributed.

**Outcomes** are the medium- and long-term effects of an activity, i.e. the change that happens as a result of the activity. This could be a gain in knowledge of how to prevent HIV, or a change in attitudes toward people living with HIV.

The **impact** of the activity is the overall long-term change, e.g., the reduction of HIV incidences amongst young people in the community.

**Indicators** are quantitative or qualitative variables that reflect changes connected to the intervention, e.g. a percentage decrease in the amount of HIV incidences or an increase in condom use among youth. To identify change over time, a **baseline** has to be established against which progress can be measured. This baseline is an assessment of the status quo, ideally before or at the start of the intervention, e.g. the current rate of HIV/AIDS incidences or the level of knowledge among youth before the intervention. A **target indicator** helps provide a specific objective for an activity, e.g. 1% decrease in the rate of HIV incidences amongst young people in the community, one year after the prevention programme started.
4.4 External Evaluations, Research and M&E

M&E cannot substitute for research or external evaluations or vice versa; ideally they should be used to complement and inform one another.

External evaluations can be expensive for an organisation. However, they present a different understanding of the organisation’s work, using a neutral, outsider perspective. This can reduce the risk of social desirability, which is often a limiting factor for M&E. Unless they build on existing M&E data, external evaluations are normally conducted after programmes have ended, and often do not have a baseline of information to which they can compare their findings. In cases where M&E data is available, it can be extremely valuable to include this with the external evaluation; the ability to triangulate internal data with data collected by an external party can be very effective and lead to sound evaluations.

Research, on the other hand, has to apply rigorous scientific standards, e.g. validated questionnaires, to meet academic standards. This is often not feasible for integrated M&E systems in countries where validated tools are scarce, e.g. in many African countries. However, if done properly, research can help answer general questions and verify assumptions. As an example, a quasi-experimental design could compare an HIV prevention programme with and without football to help shed light on the role of football in achieving positive impact.
5. Holistic M&E

Monitoring and evaluation is not an isolated activity outside of general project management. On the contrary, it affects the entire project cycle and needs to be integrated into all phases: planning, implementation and final project assessment. M&E needs to be approached holistically; it must be aligned with an organisation’s strategic goals, as well as its daily operations, while also reflecting local circumstances and capacities. This is often where M&E workshops or consultancies fall short: when they try to meet the latest research standards, which may overwhelm a grassroots NGO, or if they focus solely on an individual programme or donor requirement. In these cases, the organisation’s overall learning needs may be neglected. However, M&E is much more than just data collection and sending reports to funders. It is about knowing what the organisation wants to achieve and what needs to change for this to materialise, as well as determining whether the organisation is progressing in the right direction.

“Not everything that counts can be counted. Not everything that can be counted, counts.”

Albert Einstein

To capture this holistic approach, the inFocus Quality Standards for M&E were developed around seven different areas, which reflect an ongoing and complete M&E process. Each of the areas lists a set of standards describing the most important factors for good M&E and hence providing guidance for the development and enhancement of M&E systems. The following chapters introduce these seven quality areas, including why they are important for M&E, as well as some theoretical and practical examples of the standards related to each one.

![Graph 3: Seven quality areas of good M&E practice. Source: inFocus](image-url)
Underlying all Quality Standards are three principles which are thought to reflect good practices across all areas of M&E: participation, objectivity and efficiency.

1. Participation

Participation is a critical aspect to effective M&E. The M&E activities need to provide as much space as possible for stakeholders, including beneficiaries. They should have an active role in the monitoring process, and not only be subjects of the assessment. Participation and ownership by all staff members and stakeholders are key to ensure that the applied tools, collected data and subsequent learning are relevant and useful for the entire organisation.

2. Objectivity

It is important to keep an open mind about what the data is demonstrating and to try to understand it from different perspectives. Collecting and interpreting data in a manner that is not biased or influenced by one particular view is crucial to guarantee valid and meaningful information.

3. Alignment

M&E can be a time-consuming and costly process. Therefore, it is necessary to be as resourceful as possible to ensure that time is not wasted on collecting information that will not be used, or on writing reports that will not be read. To avoid disordered M&E, processes should be harmonised between what is planned, i.e., what is outlined in the theory of change or strategic plan, with what is measured and what is reported on.

5.1 Theory of Change

A robust theory of change is the entry point to good planning and is the basis for the entire M&E process.

A theory of change defines the organisation’s goals and maps the necessary changes that must take place at both target group and stakeholder levels, as well as the external factors. It is the basis for understanding what information is required and what data should be collected to measure the organisation’s progress towards its goals.

With a theory of change, an organisation describes how it wants to achieve its long-term vision, what preconditions must be met and how its own activities and programmes will help achieve this long-term vision.

A theory of change:

- Locates a programme or project within a wider analysis of how change occurs
- Draws on external learning about change
- Articulates an understanding of change
- Pushes an organisation to further explore change
- Acknowledges the complexity of change
- Involves the wider system and actors that also influence the organisation’s work

We will have a more detailed look on defining a theory of change in chapter 6.1.
Examples of Theory of Change Quality Standards (see full Quality Standards document attached):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The theory of change has been developed using a participatory approach. It is informed, understood and owned by all staff and volunteers.</td>
<td>A participatory approach to planning and monitoring involves all staff and volunteers informing the process and contributing to it in a meaningful way. There should be a collective ownership of the theory of change.</td>
<td>The organisation has held workshops with staff to invite them to provide input for the development of the theory of change and to ensure a transparent presentation of the process and the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The theory of change acknowledges that there are many factors (external and internal) influencing each change, not just the activities of the organisation.</td>
<td>At a community-based organisation level, the degree of control is limited because the organisation contributes to a larger development level, where many stakeholders are involved and who all influence the intended development goals.</td>
<td>Improved literacy may be influenced by schools, families and the motivation of the beneficiaries, as well as by the organisation’s programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Indicators

Indicators are essential to measure if and how well the organisation is achieving its goals. Well-defined and relevant indicators can assess whether activities have taken place and what progress has been made towards the desired outcomes. When defining indicators, it is important to consider whether they are pertinent for what the organisation wants to achieve (according to the theory of change). It also must be considered whether they are feasible for the organisation’s staff to assess themselves, or if there are other accessible sources that could measure these indicators.

Indicators can be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (descriptive).

Quantitative indicators are numerical. They are used to examine the scale or prevalence of a change, e.g. the number of people who attended a training course.

Qualitative indicators are descriptive. They tell you about the character or quality of something, using words, video, photos or diagrams.
While each has its advantages and disadvantages, it is advisable to regularly use both, as quantitative and qualitative data complement each other and together provide a more complete picture.

In order to measure progress over a specific time period, it is essential to define and measure baselines (starting points) and to set targets for indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators have been identified to measure each key activity and outcome defined by the organisation.</td>
<td>This is important to monitor if progress relating to the defined activities and outcomes is being achieved.</td>
<td>An output indicator could be the number of participants in a training course. An outcome indicator could be the percentage of participants who felt their skills have improved as a result of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators are measurable, relevant and useful for the organisation.</td>
<td>When choosing indicators, it is important to consider different questions, such as:</td>
<td>An indicator for an increase in the health of a beneficiary (as defined in the theory of change as an outcome) could be an increase in hours spent exercising per week, which relates to the number of hours the beneficiary spends playing football at a sport for development project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are we able to measure this ourselves? (Measurable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are the indicators based on a need and actually used for reporting and/or learning purposes? (Relevant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is the information specific enough to tell us what we want to know? (Useful)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Data Collection

Data collection is the specific way in which information relating to the defined indicators is collected. To collect data, one can use traditional tools such as surveys and questionnaires, or more participatory methods such as interviews, focus group discussions or storytelling. It is important to assess which tool is most relevant (depending on what needs to be measured), who is the target group and who is collecting the information. Each tool requires specific skills to make sure that it is administered in a way that minimises bias and creates strong and supportive data. To allow for triangulation and cross-checking of information, it is ideal to use different tools for the same indicator or to collect the same type of information from different sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tools are manageable for the organisation to administer.</td>
<td>Tools are <strong>practical</strong> in terms of being both <strong>cost and time effective</strong>.</td>
<td>An indicator such as the percentage of players reporting increased confidence can be measured with one question in a survey, or with an index of 50 different questions. The second approach will produce richer data, but it will be more complicated to collect (and analyse) the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools have been tested for relevance for the local context and the specific target group.</td>
<td>Tools need to be appropriate for use with the specific target group and hence take into consideration age as well as cultural and linguistic characteristics.</td>
<td>Tools that have been validated in one setting might not be relevant in another. It is crucial that data collectors and beneficiaries understand the tools to ensure that the information collected is of good quality. For example, a survey that was developed in the UK to measure happiness may not be relevant in Burkina Faso, as the concept and understanding of happiness may differ significantly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Data Management

Many organisations struggle with managing all their M&E data on multiple excel spreadsheets, databases and other data systems. A simple, efficient system for data storage helps to produce the necessary reports quickly and accurately. Having appropriate policies and processes in place will also help to securely handle the data and to ensure that confidential data is not disclosed.

Effective data management involves:
- Minimising the number of places where data is stored
- Adopting simple procedures to help staff make sure that data is entered accurately and managed securely
- Using secure systems for storing and transferring data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data is stored and managed effectively and efficiently in a central location.</td>
<td>It should be quick and simple for staff to access information when they need it. The organisation should have a centralised point of storage for data, such as a database, to avoid duplicate records of data on different databases or spread sheets. This will ensure that staff do not waste time searching for information.</td>
<td>The organisation uses a centralised data management system/software to store and report on their data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5 Learning and Improving

Learning and improving future programmes is one of the main goals of M&E. Both processes should take place on a day-to-day basis, as well as on a more strategic, periodic basis. Learning and improving involve analysing and presenting data, bringing people together to discuss and identify lessons learned and areas for improvement, and taking action to further enhance programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organisation regularly monitors progress against baselines and targets to inform continuous learning and improvement of its programmes and services.</td>
<td>Monitoring is an ongoing activity. It does not start or stop at any specific point in time. It means continuously collecting and analysing information. In order to draw conclusions on progress towards objectives, solid baseline information needs to be provided to serve as a point of reference.</td>
<td>Regular meetings are scheduled at team level and for senior management to review the collected data and identify areas for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E data and findings are shared and discussed across the organisation to maximise learning.</td>
<td>Staff and volunteers need the opportunity to internalise findings and to learn together as a team.</td>
<td>Lessons learned are shared within the organisation during monthly team meetings or using a notice board in a common area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6 Accountability and Reporting

Most funders require organisations to report on how their money has been used, as well as the results of those activities at defined times during the funding cycle. It is also good practice to provide updates to beneficiaries and the local community that show what a programme has done and how well it is achieving its goals. An efficient M&E system will enable an organisation to communicate their accountability to funders, beneficiaries and the local community by providing them with accurate and relevant reports and updates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results and lessons learned are shared with external partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries.</td>
<td>Being accountable to the local community and ensuring that they understand findings and lessons learned can go a long way in ensuring community buy-in and ownership.</td>
<td>One way of sharing results would be by holding annual meetings with community representatives to discuss progress during the year, findings and suggestions for improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7 Overall M&E Coordination

M&E needs to be managed properly. Similar to other processes within an organisation, it must be coordinated and resourced to ensure it is fully integrated into the overall operations.

Effective coordination involves the development of an overall M&E plan, which details what data needs to be collected and analysed, when, who will report it, and what resources and skills are required. It also includes making sure that M&E processes are happening as planned and, if not, that changes are being initiated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;E Quality Standard</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient human resources and capacity are allocated to M&amp;E to spread the work load across staff members and volunteers and ensure that no individual is over-burdened</td>
<td>In order to carry out M&amp;E activities efficiently, an organisation needs to have adequate (human and time) resources in place. Also, staff members need to have the necessary skillset to administer the tools and manage the data. Specific roles should be assigned for all M&amp;E activities to make sure that individuals have the time and means to carry out their tasks.</td>
<td>An M&amp;E capacity needs assessment has been conducted detailing training requirements and resource allocation priorities for an effective implementation of M&amp;E activities. Managers have mapped out the data collection responsibilities and made the necessary adjustments to guarantee that the work load is equally distributed among the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one person within the organisation is responsible for overseeing the M&amp;E process.</td>
<td>To avoid fragmented M&amp;E activities, it is vital to have one person who coordinates and facilitates the overall process.</td>
<td>In an organisation with various programmes, the M&amp;E co-ordinator holds all team members responsible for compiling the data and organising learning meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Taking a Closer Look

The following chapter will provide a closer look at three quality areas within M&E that are particularly important for a solid M&E system.

6.1 Theory of Change

There are many reasons for developing a theory of change. As mentioned in chapter 5.1, the theory of change points out what the organisation wants to achieve, how this will happen, and consequently, what programme aspects should be measured and why.

Developing a theory of change is not only important for M&E, but is also the start of any strategy development. Ideally, the whole organisation, including different stakeholders (volunteers, representatives of the target group, and partners) should be involved in the process of establishing a theory of change. A participatory process fosters ownership by staff members and other stakeholders. It helps the community and funders to understand their role within the programme and to support an aligned M&E process.

A theory of change is the starting point of strategy development and the basic structure for an M&E system

Due to strategic implications, the development of a theory of change can be a time-consuming process, which can potentially challenge the organisation’s existing assumptions and programmes. Openness for new ideas and readiness to change existing structures are necessary preconditions for a successful theory of change process.

a. Theory of Change vs. Logic Model

Within the field of international development, the use of logic models (a.k.a. logical frameworks) has been quite popular for the last decade. While there are some similarities between a logic model and a theory of change, the two approaches are inherently different.

A logical framework usually shows a lineal path, starting with a list of the organisation’s resources, activities and respective outputs, which is then linked to intended outcomes.

A theory of change uses a backwards-mapping method, starting with the impact the organisation aims to achieve and mapping its way backwards to identify the necessary preconditions that need to be in place for this impact to be achieved. Only after mapping all of the intended outcomes and changes at all levels (participants, stakeholders and external conditions) can the organisation identify its pathway within a holistic change map, adding activities that are expected to have an influence on the identified preconditions.

While logic model list the components and outcomes of a programme in a more simplistic way, reflecting what the organisation already does, a theory of change looks at the broader context for change. It challenges the assumptions that underpin an organisation’s programmes.
b. Example: Defining a Theory of Change

These are some of the key steps to take and questions to answer for any organisation wanting to develop a Theory of Change:

1. **Identifying the core problem and target group**
   - What is the reason for our existence? What is the main problem we are addressing and what are its causes and consequences? Who is affected most by this problem?

2. **Mapping stakeholders and external factors**
   - Recognizing that we are not working in isolation. Who/what else is influencing our target group? What external factors need to be taken into account when addressing the core problem?

3. **Defining the impact**
   - What is the ultimate goal we want to achieve? Which goal will fully address the core problem?

4. **Identifying the necessary preconditions**
   - What are the necessary preconditions for impact to be achieved? What outcomes or changes need to happen at different levels (target group, stakeholders and external circumstances) to lead to these preconditions and ultimately to reach the intended impact?

5. **Determining our pathway within the change map**
   - What activities are best suited to influence the different outcomes or changes and preconditions? Which ones are within our scope? What is our pathway of change to achieve impact?

6. **Defining indicators**
   - What are the indicators that can inform us on our progress towards the changes and preconditions? How will we know if an outcome or change has been achieved?

7. **Noting underlying assumptions**
   - What are other potential limitations and risks apart from our organisation’s own activities? What are the inherent hypotheses our theory of change is based upon? Do we share the same assumptions throughout the organisation and with the most important stakeholders?
6.2 Data Collection

In chapter 5.3, data collection was defined as a process of generating information according to the indicators defined during the theory of change process. How the information for each indicator will be collected is defined by choosing particular methods and tools. The overall aim of data collection is to collect strong and supportive information that is manageable and easy to interpret.

The overall aim of data collection is to collect strong and supportive information that is manageable and easy to interpret.

Data Collection Tools

Data collection methods and tools vary in format and scope. They depend on the type of information the organisation wants to collect (output or outcome data) and the source of the information.

a. Output vs. Outcome Data

Outputs demonstrate whether activities have taken place and what their immediate results were. Outcome data relates to the measurement of changes or progress towards the organisation’s goals. The consistent collection of output data is the basis for M&E. It is usually relatively easy and doesn’t require complex tools or specific data collection skills. Most organisations use simple forms, such as attendance sheets or registration forms, to capture output data. The consistent use of outcome data can be more complex and requires careful data collection processes and trained data collectors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of output data</th>
<th>Examples of respective tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Number of participants at a workshop for coaches</td>
<td>- Attendance sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of vaccines given out to community members</td>
<td>- List of vaccinations given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Amount of euros collected at annual celebrity dinner</td>
<td>- Spreadsheet listing the individual donations received</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of outcome data</th>
<th>Examples of respective tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Increased literacy capacity among participants</td>
<td>- Literacy tests assessing reading and writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decrease of violence within community</td>
<td>- Community mapping to identify safe or unsafe spaces in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improved employment opportunities for young graduates</td>
<td>- Focus group discussion to gather feedback and explore perception of young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b. Source of Information

The scope and format of data collection methods, tools and processes also depend highly on the source of information, in particular when collecting data about individuals. We can distinguish between the following:

- Direct statements made by individuals, collected through questionnaires, interviews or focus groups with the target group.
- Third-party statements collected through questionnaires, interviews or focus groups with parents, teachers or other third parties about the target group.
- Observations made by the data collector, including external observations about individual or group behaviour in the target group.
- Objective measurements, e.g., mathematics tests.

When relying on statements made either by the individuals themselves or by a third party, data collection tools need to be appropriate for the specific type of respondents, e.g., youth- or child-friendly tools or those suitable for people who are illiterate.

Data collectors have to be equipped with the relevant skills to collect data using the identified tools or methods. Younger children in particular might perceive the data collection tools or methods as a test, making social desirability an issue. One of the biggest challenges of data collection is ensuring that the tools or methods have a balance between being user friendly and culturally sensitive, while ensuring that the collected information is still strong, valid and reliable.
c. Examples of Outcome Tools

There is a wide range of data collection tools available to organisations. The following provides descriptions of two instruments in particular, and details on how best to use them.

**Questionnaires**

When it comes to scientific research, one of the most popular data collection tools, apart from the classic interview, is the questionnaire.

*A questionnaire is one of the most popular data collection tools*

Questionnaires are used to collect pre-defined indicators and to monitor the achievement of expected outcomes. Programme participants and stakeholders are asked to fill in paper or digital surveys at different intervals over the course of a programme or project. A popular way to detect changes in the knowledge or behaviours of participants is to administer pre- and post-questionnaires, i.e. handing out the same survey before and after a specific programme in order to identify changes which could have occurred over the course of the programme.

**Advantages**

With written, structured surveys mostly focusing on quantitative data, an organisation can capture data from a large number of participants and obtain a substantial amount of data, which is relatively easy to analyse. For the informants, questionnaires can be an anonymous way to report on their knowledge and attitudes or to share their feelings about a programme.

As academic research often focuses on using questionnaires, there is a wealth of tested and validated questionnaires on different topics that are available for use.

**Disadvantages**

Despite the existence of different validated questionnaires, each questionnaire needs to be tested for appropriateness within the individual context and with the respective target groups. For example, not all concepts and questions can be easily translated into other languages. Some questions might also not be culturally appropriate and/or too difficult to understand for a younger target group.

Children and young people in particular may get tired of filling out long questionnaires. They also might consider questionnaires as something similar to a school exam and, therefore, may not answer honestly, focusing instead on trying to pick what they think is the “correct” option.

While questionnaires are quite suitable to test the change of knowledge among participants, monitoring behaviour change on the basis of questionnaires is much more challenging. For these outcomes, alternative tools may be more appropriate, such as observations and storytelling.
Most Significant Change (MSC)

A less traditional but widely used M&E tool among sport for development organisations is the methodology of most significant change (MSC). This methodology makes use of the richness and detail of individual stories.

With MSC organisations seek to learn about what was unexpected instead of monitoring the progress of specific pre-defined indicators only.

The most significant change methodology aims to reveal new and key lessons of a programme.

MSC is a form of participatory M&E that should take place throughout a programme cycle. Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, which illustrate participant’s experiences in the programme. It also includes a systematic selection of the most significant stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The most significant lessons within these stories are often clustered according to themes, and the stories are shared across the whole organisation and with the broader group of stakeholders.

This method provides feedback on how the programme is perceived, as well as data on the impact and any unexpected outcomes that can be used to assess the performance of the programme as a whole.

Advantages

MSC does not require any special professional skills from data collectors. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to use when communicating across cultures and also with younger participants. There is no need to explain M&E, nor what an indicator is; everyone can tell stories about events they think were important. It helps to understand the project from the participant’s point of view, and often results in the identification of unexpected outcomes.

Disadvantages

MSC is not suitable for responding to pre-determined indicators or specific outcomes and, consequently, may not respond to all of the reporting requirements from donors and stakeholders. It is also a relatively time-consuming process, which needs the acceptance and commitment of staff members and stakeholders at different levels in order to extract and make use of the most significant lessons learned.

Graphic 4. MSC focuses on personal narratives and learns from them.
Source: www.impactandlearning.org
6.3 Learning

As mentioned previously, the main reason for conducting M&E is to foster learning within an organisation; M&E findings help to identify and address possible gaps and, therefore, to improve programme design and delivery. To make the most of M&E, it is important to think of it as an ongoing cycle that uses previous lessons for future plans.

Learning can happen very spontaneously and is, of course, not bound to specific M&E processes only. For organisations to get the most out of their M&E activities, it is essential to structure regular learning processes within the organisation and with important stakeholders.

Learning from M&E involves:
- Analysing and presenting the collected data to staff and stakeholders
- Jointly discussing findings and identifying lessons learned and potential areas for improvement
- Taking action to further enhance programmes and M&E processes.

Learning can happen during:
- Regular progress reviews, e.g., weekly or monthly team meetings, to assess what activities have been implemented and what development has been made towards objectives, as well as to identify necessary amendments to maximise progress towards future objectives
- Periodic detailed reviews, e.g., an annual review for the programme and/or the Theory of Change, to look at the collected data more extensively, identify trends, discuss challenges, and formulate lessons learned and areas for future improvement.

It can help to structure learning processes according to the following five stages:

**Graph 5: Five basic steps for learning and improving**

*Source: InFocus*
**STEP 1: Involve the right people at the right times**

It is advisable to plan specific times at which different people will be integrated into the learning process, including both internal and external stakeholders. It is useful to map stakeholders according to their specific interests in the programme in order to define the scope and best time for their involvement, e.g., parents may only want to hear about specific programme outcomes that relate to their children, whereas the board of directors or external funders may be more interested in learning about the efficiency of different activities.

**STEP 2: Present the data**

M&E data, as any data, should be processed and prepared to ensure it is presented in a clear and understandable way. Instead of showing raw data sets, it is useful to categorise or cluster information by specific programmes or outcomes, and to present it using charts, graphs or tables. These visuals make it easier for the audience to detect specific trends, changes, or gaps of knowledge. Nonetheless, the narrative component of the presentation should not be neglected. All data presented needs to be embedded into a specific context, in order for audiences to understand what they’re looking at. To avoid data overload, it is important to present only data that can be considered relevant for the specific audience. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the risk of “fruit picking” when deciding on the importance of data, and to make certain that not only data which demonstrate positive findings are presented.

**STEP 3: Interpret data and formulate lessons learned**

During any review, there should be discussions about the data presented. Guiding questions for such discussions include: Are we on track with the project implementation? What are the reasons for positive or negative data development? Are these findings in line with our expectations or were some unexpected? What consequences have to be drawn from the findings and what does this mean for the future?

Both positive and negative findings should be discussed and documented to understand the different internal and external factors that may have led to that development, and may not have been visible by looking at the presented data. A simple example could be that, in the last quarter, a negative attendance rate at football tournaments could be a result of the low quality of the tournament (internal factor), but could also be due to bad weather or transportation issues (external factors).

**Identified problem**

The data shows no improvements in the literacy levels among children attending the literacy programme.

**Analysis and reasons**

Children’s feedback is that the class is boring.

**Lesson learned**

Programme needs to be adapted to become more interactive and fun.

Table 1. Example lessons learned and future changes
STEP 4: Share the lessons learned

Ideally when formulating lessons learned, the leadership of the organisation should be present to confirm their commitment to put recommendations into action. These findings, their meaning for the organisation and its particular programmes, and plans for the future should all be documented well and shared among staff members and with other stakeholders. Sharing lessons learned guarantees transparency, understanding and support. It also ensures that necessary changes, which might not immediately be feasible, are not neglected in the long run.

STEP 5: Plan improvements

Implementing changes into programmes that are already running should be seen as a project which needs to be carefully planned, while also taking into account the limited resources or capacities to do so. While some improvements can be implemented immediately, others might require additional time or financial resources, in which case their implementation might need to be postponed. Nonetheless, next steps, roles, responsibilities and timelines should be defined to make sure that these recommendations are adequately addressed in a given time period and format.
7. Challenges and Pitfalls

One of the most common challenges for M&E is limited time and resources. Even if organisations are eager to introduce impact measurement into their daily work, the development, testing and integration of different tools and processes requires a lot of time, staff and finances. Progress proves to be challenging particularly in cases where staff resources are not clearly assigned to M&E.

Another common challenge many organisations face is the lack of necessary skills among staff to carry out data collection and analysis. Oftentimes, staff members don’t understand the purpose and benefits of M&E for their own work or for the organisation as a whole. To address this challenge, participatory development of the M&E system is critical, and additional staff training is useful to teach the necessary skills.

The entire process of impact measurement is often carried out in order to satisfy donor requirements, meaning that the whole process is also aligned with their demands. Normally, organisations want to demonstrate the great things they have done with their money in order to receive more financial support in the future. This aligns well with donors who very often prefer to see positive findings. However, this approach prevents both greater learning through M&E and more effective delivery of programmes in the future. The use of M&E to confirm what you would like to see prevents it to be used to identify ineffective programme delivery.

With several factors influencing children and young people (peers, family, teachers, the media, etc.), it is a bold statement to attribute all changes in their attitudes or behaviours to one programme. However, it is still important to note that the more robust the data is, the stronger the evidence will stand. Triangulation, i.e. collecting data from different sources such as children, parents and teachers, or using different tools to measure the same outcome, is a good way of solidifying findings. This process of developing, testing and adapting different indicators and tools can be extensive, but it is worthwhile because it denotes an organisation focused on learning and improving, and most likely will be appreciated by all different stakeholders, including funders, parents and the participants themselves.
Bibliography


