DARWIN INITIATIVE

Monitoring and evaluation and the Darwin Initiative

Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a requirement for all Darwin projects. M&E has been necessary for Darwin projects for many years, however, the standard required has increased in recent years.

This briefing paper is intended to help Darwin projects teams and applicants to understand what we mean by M&E. Given the diversity of the Darwin portfolio there are people coming from very different starting points when it comes to M&E. Here we have attempted to encapsulate M&E from the perspective of the Darwin Initiative's requirements. In short we cover:

- What is M&E?
- What are the fundamentals of M&E?
- How should it be used?
- When should it be used?
- Who should use it?
- A glossary of useful M&E terminology

The Darwin Initiative supports developing countries to conserve biodiversity and reduce poverty. Funded by the UK Government, the Darwin Initiative provides grants for projects working in developing countries and UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

Projects support:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Fliora (CITES)

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What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring

Monitoring refers to regular evidence collection that demonstrates the progress of a project against objectives. This is of interest to all stakeholders (donors, partners and local communities).

As part of your Darwin application you are required to set yourself objectives and measurable indicators. What you monitor is based on these targets and activities agreed and set out during your application.

Monitoring can be used to keep work on track and identify potential problems early on. In other words, good attention to monitoring can:

- Help you continually assess the progress and performance of your project.
- Help you report and demonstrate progress to donors and other key stakeholders.
- Support learning on what works well that feeds into the adaptive management of projects.
- Provide the basis for project evaluation.

Evaluation

Evaluation allows us to determine whether a project has been worthwhile and delivered what was intended and expected.

If the project's monitoring was well set-up to begin with it is a relatively straightforward job to verify the results. If the project had poor M&E from the start it may require substantial new information/data to be collected to allow us to understand project achievements and the scale of impact.

Evaluation looks at the results of a project as a whole to understand what has changed, how and for whom. A useful analogy may be that of testing a hypothesis - your objective is your hypothesis of what will be achieved by the end of the project. An evaluation should seek to 'test', by analysing the gathered evidence, whether this can be proven.

What are the fundamentals of M&E?

Figure 1: The project monitoring and evaluation cycle

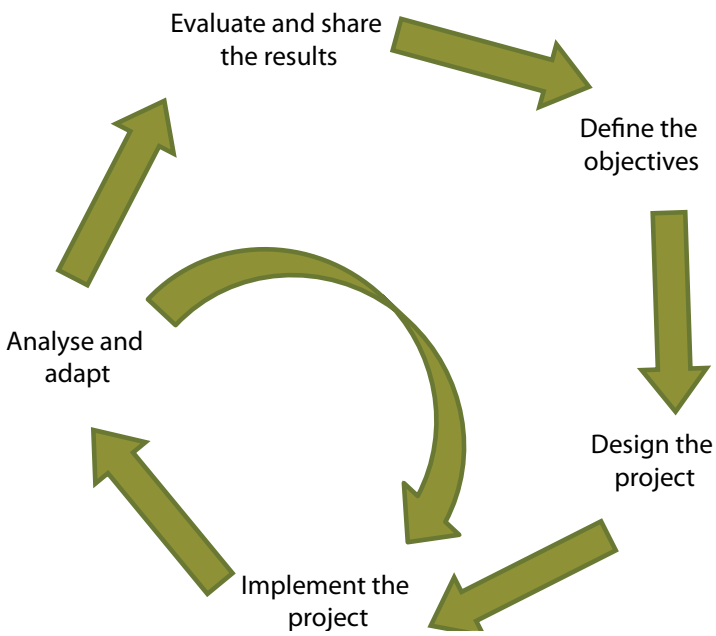

Figure 1 shows a typical M&E cycle. Key points to consider are set out below.

Good planning

Investing time and effort in the project planning stage will always pay off. Rushing the planning phase can cost you more time and money in the future. Use this time to identify:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- How will your outputs be delivered?
- What external factors/risks may affect your delivery?
- What assumptions are you making around these external factors?
- How can you mitigate these risks?

Developing a theory of change diagram can be useful for visualising linkages between all the various actions, outputs and stakeholders.

Setting measurable indicators

How will you know when you have achieved what you set out to do? What signposts can be useful to understand if you are moving in the right direction?

To answer these questions you will need good, measurable indicators. Indicators are used at all stages of project monitoring and evaluation. They may be:

- **Quantitative:** Data can be measured on a numeric scale e.g. change in household nutrition.
- **Qualitative:** present information on change in non-numeric terms e.g. biodiversity action plan includes allocation of resources for monitoring.
- **Performance:** the effective or efficient operation of an activity e.g. Number of illegal incursions to protected area since gazettement.
- **Achievement:** the successful completion of an activity, project or programme e.g. % of households that receive training in Village Savings and Loans Agreements.
- **Accountability:** responsibility for the performance and/or achievements of the activity e.g. % of field stations submitting monitoring data to national focal point.

Indicators

SMART indicators

Indicators are a key component of any M&E plan. It should be possible to consistently measure indicators over time, in the same way by different observers. We often talk about indicators needing to be SMART.

Capturing gender

Since the UK's International Development (Gender Equality) Act was passed in 2014 it has been a requirement of Darwin projects to report on the gender dimension of their impact. It is important to ensure logframe indicators are disaggregated by sex or are sensitive to gender. Sex disaggregation will measure males and females separately, for example: primary enrolment rate (boys and girls); number health professionals trained (by male/female).

Box 1: An explanation of SMART indicators

SMART Indicators	Description
Specific	Do you know what is to be measured?
Measurable	Can it be measured? This will usually answer questions like how much, how many, how will I know when it is accomplished?
Achievable	The indicator is realistic for the project. That is it will be possible to see the desired change within the timeframe of the project.
Relevant	Does this relate to the project outcome/ output? It is possible for an indicator to be specific but not relevant.
Time-bound	Is there a defined time when this indicator will be achieved and therefore measured?

How should M&E be used?

Developing an M&E plan

Setting measurable objectives is step 1 but don't forget to identify WHO will undertake the monitoring work. It is common for projects to set themselves strong measurable objectives but forget to assign responsibility for collecting the relevant data until the Annual Report is due. An example of a simple M&E plan is provided in Box 2.

It is useful if job descriptions of people on the team include detail of the indicators they are responsible for supporting. Projects that do not define roles and responsibilities for M&E often struggle to present the necessary evidence required as part of project reporting.

What needs to be monitored/ evaluated?	Evidence/ data required	Where evidence/ data is to be sourced?	When and how often is information required?	Roles and responsibilities	Who will do this work?	Resources (time, £, staff, input from others)

Box 2: An example of a simple M&E plan that will help planning

Using M&E

When and by whom should M&E be used

A good M&E plan should be revisited regularly, ideally at project management meetings. Doing so enables project progress and performance to be assessed, and enables staff working on different aspects of a project to share any lessons learnt during implementation. Some projects teams meet monthly, quarterly or annually to assess their progress. The project logical framework is an ideal tool for shaping these meetings. A project's Annual Report provides a further useful opportunity to review progress and report against it for Darwin.

M&E is also used at programme level to understand the contribution of multiple projects to the overarching objective. The Darwin Initiative regularly commissions programme-level evaluations to better understand what the sum of its parts means when it comes to biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation.

Cost of M&E

It is recommended by the Darwin Initiative that **up to 5% of a project budget should be spent on M&E**. Based on years of assessing the success of projects it is clear that projects that prioritise M&E are best able to demonstrate their success and achievements. By not investing in suitable M&E, projects can fail to adapt to changing circumstances, struggle to define what success looks like and have problems engaging and maintaining the interest of stakeholders crucial to the success of the project.

'It is recommended by the Darwin Initiative that up to 5% of project budget should be spent on M&E'

Glossary of key M&E terms for Darwin

Logical framework (logframe): A logframe is a planning and management tool that helps to strengthen project design and implementation. The logframe channels project designers into applying clear, logical thought when seeking to tackle the complex and ever-changing challenges of poverty and need. The phrase 'if, and, then' can be useful when discussing logical frameworks.

- If these Activities are implemented, and these Assumptions hold, then these Outputs will be delivered.
- If these Outputs are delivered, and these Assumptions hold, then this Outcome will be achieved.
- If this Outcome is achieved, and these Assumptions hold, then this Impact will be achieved.

Impact: The Impact is not intended to be achieved solely by the project. This is a higher-level situation that the project will contribute towards achieving.

Outcome: There can only be one Outcome for the project. The Outcome should identify what will change, and who will benefit. That is, what do you expect to achieve as a result of this project.

Output: Outputs are the specific, direct deliverables of the project. These will provide the conditions necessary to achieve the project Outcome. That is, if the outputs are achieved then the logic is that the outcome will also be achieved. **It is recommended that you have a maximum of 5 outputs to avoid overcomplicating your project.**

Activities: Activities should be designed in a way that their completion should be sufficient and indicators should not be necessary. Only summarised main activities are required, but these should be numbered against the output that they relate to.

Indicators: Indicators should be specific, usable and clearly measurable. The basic principle is that "if you can measure it, you can manage it". Indicators should be useful both for internal reflection but also for external reporting. They should allow you to demonstrate what you have achieved and when.

Assumptions: It will be clear when checking this logic that achievements are also dependent on external conditions which are outside the control of the project. Risks and assumptions are factors that are beyond the direct control of your project. It is important to maintain an understanding of these factors to ensure your project in its current format is still achievable – that is you should monitor the situation and adapt your project approach in light of any changes.

Means of Verification: The location of the sources of evidence used to verify data or statements made during reporting, to ensure it is appropriate and applicable. This evidence should be supplied with Annual and Final reports to substantiate claims e.g. website statistics.

Baseline (data): Data gathered prior to, or at the beginning of, project commencement. Change and project progress can then be monitored in relation to this data. Baseline data is essentially the first step in what will become the project evaluation. They provide useful benchmarks on the 'then' and 'now', to allow project progress to be evaluated.

Summary

Monitoring and evaluation is important not just to donors but also to project participants and stakeholders. It allows project progress to be assessed and the impact of work undertaken to be understood.

Investing time in the planning stage always pays off, with well-planned projects better able to demonstrate success. Defining measurable targets and regularly reviewing the evidence of progress towards these targets enables projects to understand what is working and why. It also allows projects to take advantage of changing circumstances and adopt an adaptive management approach.

Key references

- Building the Evidence to Reduce Poverty, DFID.
- The Logical Framework Approach, BOND
- Impact evaluation: A guide for commissioners and managers, BOND

The Darwin Initiative is funded by the UK Government and aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world including the UK's Overseas Territories. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has committed over £113million to over 943 projects in 159 countries.

This learning note was produced by LTS International www.ltsi.co.uk

For more information on the Darwin Initiative see http://darwininitiative.org.uk

Darwin Initiative Secretariat, Defra. Zone 1/15, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Bristol BS1 6EB. Tel: 0117 372 3599 Email: Darwin@defra.gsi.gov.uk