
CHAPTER 5

SELECTING INDICATORS FOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION

by Lakshmi Goparaju

'Indicator' is a word that we hear very often in monitoring & evaluation. It's not an exaggeration to say that M&E revolves around indicators. Both in participatory and conventional M&E, indicators play an important role. In this chapter we will learn about: indicators and their selection, and indicators and their use in monitoring.

WHAT ARE INDICATORS?

The word indicator is indeed a very literal word: indicators **indicate or tell** something about something (National Institute of Public Health Phnom Penh 2000). Indicators are signals: they signal status of something, or change in something; they work as markers like milestones on the roadside, which tell us how far we have gone on, or where we are at a given point.

We discussed earlier in the manual that monitoring is an activity that we all do all the time in our everyday lives even though we don't call it 'monitoring.' We monitor our own activities. We monitor how the rice cooks, whether our children are growing up according to their age, whether our crops are growing as they should—name any activity, we know that there is monitoring involved. Indicators are milestones or markers that show where we are in an activity, that we are making progress, and that we are heading in the right direction. They also show whether we have achieved our objectives. In the example of

cooking rice, the following activities and corresponding indicators can be identified:

Stage	Indicator
Fire ready	Flames
Water boils	Bubbles and steam coming from the water
Rice cooked well	The grain is soft, and the taste is good
Objective accomplished	We have rice to eat!

When we implement projects, we use indicators to check project progress and results. Indicators are ‘measures’ that we use to demonstrate progress and results to ourselves, to the beneficiary community, and to the donors.

PROCESS AND CHANGE INDICATORS

In most projects there are two types of indicators: one type indicate or tell at what stage we are in implementing the project—in other words, they show our progress in completing planned activities. These are called **process indicators**. They indicate how much work we have done. The other type of indicators describes the level of change that we have achieved through our activities. These are called **change indicators**. They are also referred to as results indicators since they indicate the results that achieved through the project’s intervention. Indicators are, therefore, used to track progress and change. Let’s look at the indicators in the example of cooking rice and identify which are process indicators and which are change/results indicators.

Stage	Indicator
Fire ready	Flames (<i>Process indicator</i>)
Water boils	Bubbles and steam (<i>Process indicator</i>)
Rice cooked well	Grain is soft; good taste (<i>Change indicators</i>)
Objective accomplished	Rice to eat! (<i>Change indicator</i>)

Change Indicators/Results Indicators

Indicators that show results of project activities; directly linked to objectives and expected results.

Process Indicators

Indicators that show progress of planned project activities; directly linked to activities.

In any project, indicators depend on the project's objectives. While objectives tell us what the project plans to achieve, indicators tell us how to measure to ascertain if those objectives are achieved or not.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD INDICATOR?

A good indicator clearly demonstrates the expected progress or result. It measures the intended change as accurately as possible. It is clearly defined, easily understood and easily measured. For example, in an AIDS orphans project, the objective is to provide 500 AIDS orphans with nutritional supplements. One indicator that measures the success of this objective is to count the actual number of children provided with nutritional supplements. "Number of AIDS orphans provided with nutritional supplements" is a simple and straightforward indicator. At the start of project monitoring, we need to agree on the definition that the project will use to define "AIDS orphan" and "nutritional supplements." Then we are sure that project staff and community members in all of the project sites are recording standardized information on this particular activity.

Sometimes we have to use indirect indicators, which are also called proxy indicators, to measure change. For example, in a project aiming to reduce stigma affecting AIDS orphans, it is difficult to identify direct indicators

because stigma is complex and manifests itself in various forms. In such cases, we use indirect indicators to measure how the level of stigma affecting AIDS orphans is declining. Here are a couple of proxy indicators for community-level stigma reduction: number of AIDS orphans being hosted in extended family households; number of AIDS orphans being admitted into school. Direct or indirect, good indicators measure the achievements of the objectives as closely as possible.

The following rules of thumb will help in selecting indicators²

- ✓ **Review objectives carefully.** Try to understand exactly what they are saying.
- ✓ **Avoid formulating objectives in a broad manner;** such objectives are not clear and make it difficult to identify indicators for monitoring and evaluation purposes. For example, “HIV prevention through AIDS education” is a broad objective. Instead, use specifics of the project’s intentions in the objective such as “educate X number of young adults living in village XYZ about HIV prevention within 6 months.” That can lead to specific indicators such as “knowledge of HIV transmission” “knowledge of HIV prevention.” Also define project beneficiaries; for example, is it the entire village, or selected families or individuals? A school, senior class forms or individual students? It’s important to clarify these aspects of project implementation at the objective level because they determine indicator selection and definition and influence analysis. For each indicator, you will need to know what the ultimate unit of analysis should be -- individuals, family, school, community.
- ✓ **Be clear about what type of change is implied.** What does the project expect to change? Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, situations, laws,

² Adapted from USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation. 1996. Selecting Performance Indicators. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS. USAID. Washington DC.

policies, or social atmosphere. And at what level? Individual, household, group, community.

FOUR TYPES OF INDICATORS

There are four types of indicators generally used in project monitoring and evaluation: numerical; scaling or ranking; classifying; and, descriptive. Each type of indicator is described below.

- **Numerical** provides exact numbers. Numerical indicators are also called quantitative indicators. Examples of numerical indicators are: number of people trained; number of condoms sold; number of orphans served; number of people who come for treatment of sexually transmitted infections; number of people living with HIV and AIDS on antiretroviral treatment. The data for these indicators are counted.
- **Scaling or ranking** provide graduated descriptions of assessment. For example, people can rank sexual satisfaction when using a condom during intercourse on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 is highly satisfying and 1 is not satisfying at all.
- **Classifying** provides answers in categories: Yes or No; Male or Female; Animist or Catholic or Muslim or Protestant.
- **Descriptive** indicators are qualitative because they describe the state of something in words. Examples of descriptive indicators are: people living with HIV are allowed to attend religious services; HIV-positive children are allowed to attend school; the inheritance rights of AIDS widows are fulfilled.

It is important to define the indicators clearly at the very beginning. This is even more important in the case of qualitative indicators so that everyone has the same understanding, and that they are not interpreted differently by different people. While numerical indicators are easy to adapt, count and report, they are not necessarily the most useful and meaningful indicators.

Indicators that will be monitored over a period of time need to remain relatively stable over time. Sometimes project staff will write a proposal with one set of indicators in mind, and then find better or more practical indicators once they move on to project implementation. This is not unusual, and is acceptable practice. Efforts should be made, however, to maintain the same set of indicators once monitoring begins.

Make sure that the indicators you choose are practical for data which can be collected on a regular basis. Also important is that the data can be collected at a reasonable cost and in reasonable time.

WHO SELECTS INDICATORS?

In the rice-cooking example, our ancestors who figured out how to cook rice identified indicators to describe the cooking process. Perhaps the indicators developed over time, emerging gradually with experience in cooking rice. Once everyone knew the process of cooking rice, everyone could use the same indicators to describe progress. In the same way, people who design projects also develop monitoring plans and indicators.

In PM&E, the community and the implementing organization select the indicators together, with input from the donor, and conduct monitoring. It is helpful to develop a monitoring plan and relevant indicators soon after developing objectives and activities, and before project implementation begins. In addition to the community and the implementing CBO or FBO, donors also select indicators, based on what they need to know about the project's impact. Donor identified indicators focus on whether the project is progressing as planned, what it has achieved, and what effect it has had on the intended beneficiaries.

HOW TO SELECT INDICATORS?

This is an important stage in developing the monitoring and evaluation plan. Selected indicators guide monitoring and evaluation activities. Communities have their own way of looking at expected results. Hence the indicators they choose might differ somewhat from the donor-chosen indicators, and that is fine. For example, in an HIV prevention project, while the donor may focus on number of condoms distributed, the community may be more concerned about who is receiving those condoms. These are basically two aspects of the same expected result. It's important to choose indicators that will serve the project well in proving its value to both the donor and to the community. Find the mix of indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, that achieves this purpose.

STEPS IN DEVELOPING AND SELECTING INDICATORS

The process of selecting indicators involves the following steps.

1. Once a monitoring group is formed with members of the community and staff from the CBO/FBO, they should discuss and develop a monitoring plan and decide what indicators will be monitored. (For details on group formation, see Chapter 2.) In the group meeting, discuss what kind of change is expected out of the project objectives. Study the intended activities, and discuss whether they directly or indirectly lead to intended change.
2. Develop a list of possible indicators by brainstorming amongst members of the monitoring group. Be sure to consult with others involved in the project, and look at lists of indicators that have been developed and used by others. [For ideas, refer to the list of indicators provided in the Annex of this manual.] Consider the objectives from different stakeholders' points of view, and try to think what each type of stakeholder would like to know

about the project. At this early stage, include all possible indicators because you'll narrow the list later.

3. Now review and discuss each indicator you have included on the list. Compare it with alternative indicators, and see which best suits your project. Also consider the effort and cost involved in collecting data on these indicators.
4. Make sure that indicators are clearly linked to specific objectives. This helps even when different people collect data and analyze them.
5. Try to select simple indicators which focus on one dimension or one aspect of expected change. The more complicated an indicator is, the more difficult to collect data on it and analyze and interpret those data.
6. There are no hard and fast rules about whether you should select quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (descriptive) indicators. Use your own judgment.
7. If a project continues to implement an activity over a long period of time, the same indicators should be monitored through out. Distributing/selling condoms is a good example. In a project aiming to increase condom use, project staff and community members can monitor indicators such as, number of condoms sold, characteristics of clients who buy condoms, condom sales by location, and so on.
8. When you collect data on a people-related indicators, remember to separate people at least by sex and then by age, location, or other dimensions depending upon relevance. This is important because people are not the same, and depending on their sex, age, and other background characteristics, their situations change. For example, levels of use of condoms are usually very different across different age groups of men. Similarly, use of condoms differs widely between men and women.

9. Make sure that you are selecting indicators on which you can collect reliable data and that, wherever necessary; data can be collected on a continuous basis. Once you select indicators, you need to decide how you will collect data on them. Consider what methods are best suited to collect data on the selected indicators. Check out some of the participatory methods described in the Annex.
10. Write down each indicator's definition as your group perceived it, how you are you going to collect data on it, from where/whom (source of data), frequency and timing of data collection—once a month, every two months, and so on.
11. We need to think about all of our information/data need in setting up recording mechanisms. When condoms are sold, the sales person can record in a sales register the number of condoms sold to each male and female client.

Note: Many of these steps will be carried out simultaneously. Our intention in providing the detail above is to explain the process step by step – because it's that easy!

HOW ARE INDICATORS USED IN MONITORING?

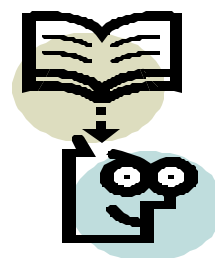
Data that we collect periodically on selected indicators has to be analyzed and discussed in the monitoring group. As described in chapter 2, the monitoring group should try to meet regularly—once a week, once in two weeks or once a month, depending on the project needs and the group availability. We discussed the need to involve project beneficiaries in this group. Remember that the group should divide responsibilities of reporting on indicators amongst themselves. Monitoring group members should divide themselves into smaller

groups of 2 or 3, and each group should take responsibility to report on a few—say 2 or 3—indicators. This will distribute the work burden. Smaller groups can work more efficiently on a few indicators and report the data and their analysis in the larger monitoring group meetings.

Remember that continuous reflection is more important than meticulous gathering of data. The overall monitoring group should discuss, accept, modify or strengthen the analysis of the smaller group. Once this is done, it should be presented to the community and the CBO/NGO who is implementing the project in their monthly or quarterly meetings. This meeting will discuss the monitoring results and the recommendations, and will decide whether any changes need to be made in the activities.

Remember!

Collecting data is not useful unless the data are analyzed, discussed and used to assess how the project is going and to make decisions regarding project implementation.



CAN WE MODIFY OR ADD INDICATORS AT A LATER STAGE?

We have discussed how it is important to identify the indicators at the beginning of the project. It is also important that once in a while you reassess the indicators to see whether or not they are measuring what you expected them to measure, and whether those indicators make sense as the project is progressing. If any adjustments were made to the project's objectives or activities, you may need to adjust the indicators to reflect modifications in objectives and/or activities.

Faith-Informed Indicators for HIV and AIDS Projects

by James M. Matarazzo Jr.

A recent development has been increased willingness of governmental agencies to fund faith-based HIV/AIDS initiatives. In this new environment, FBOs have been confronted with reporting requirements that are often beyond their capacity to fulfil. FBOs are largely implementers of programs; they have not been required in the past to report their activities and outcomes to donors in a structured and periodic manner.

FBOs, however, can be data collectors. With their wide networks and human resources, especially in terms of a large and committed pool of volunteers, they have the capacity to do good reporting on their HIV/AIDS project outcomes. In this context, participatory monitoring and evaluation (P&ME) will be an ideal methodology for FBOs to utilize in monitoring their projects, reporting back to their communities and to donors. PM&E's highly interactive approach will appeal to FBOs by giving staff and community members a concrete role to play in the evaluation of their own programs. This will, in turn, scale up FBO reporting quality and enable them to show positive outcomes, and thus successfully apply for additional donor funding.

At a recent materials development workshop held with faith-based organizations in Uganda, participants brainstormed on the type of information that would be useful to them in monitoring their projects and developed potential faith-informed indicators based on these information needs. The indicators developed by the workshop participants fell into five categories: (1) Capacity Building, (2) Pastoral Counselling, (3) Care and Support, (4) Awareness, and (5) Advocacy. The group was asked to designate the indicators most important to them in their work (one indicator per category) and the following were chosen:

Capacity Building	Number of religious leaders trained on facts about HIV/AIDS
Pastoral Counseling	Number of HIV affected accessing pastoral counseling services
Care and Support	Number of HIV/AIDS affected person receiving care and supported by FBOs.
Awareness	Number of compassionate HIV/AIDS messages offered by FBOs
Advocacy	Number of HIV/AIDS sensitive advocacy policies approved by FBO

Key Learning Points

- ⇒ Indicators indicate status of things/situations/changes. Indicators are signals: they show status of something, or change in something; they also work as markers like milestones on roadside, which indicate how far we have gone on, or where/at what stage are we at a given point of time.
- ⇒ There are two types of indicators: process indicators and change/result indicators.
- ⇒ A good indicator clearly demonstrates the expected result or progress. It should measure the intended change as closely as possible.
- ⇒ Indicators can be numerical, scaling or ranking, classifying and descriptive.
- ⇒ The communities, beneficiaries, implementing CBO/NGO select indicators, and add theirs to the donor's indicators.
- ⇒ Indicators need to be developed soon after objectives and activities are developed and before the project implementation begins. They should not be changed once monitoring begins.
- ⇒ Indicators may be modified if and when the project objectives or strategies are changed.

EXAMPLES OF INDICATORS FOR STIGMA REDUCTION PROJECTS IN LESOTHO

The following table provides examples of community-level stigma reductions indicators developed by CBOs and FBOs in Lesotho during a CORE Initiative project design workshop conducted in December 2003. All of the projects were small in scope, and planned to be implemented within one year or less.

Table: Indicators selected for Stigma Reduction Projects in Lesotho

Objectives	Indicators
Conduct a 3 day training for 10 community leaders from each of the 3 villages on discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS and affected families by the 3 rd month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of training workshops conducted ____ • Number of community leaders trained ____ Male__ Female__
Disseminate information on discrimination of infected and affected people by trained 30 community leaders each holding 3 meetings of 50 participants per session in 7 months time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of dissemination meetings held ____ • No. of people attended Male____ Female____ • No. of PLHA attended Male____ Female____
Train volunteers to conduct 2 two-day) workshops with community leaders, members and support groups in Tsenola on the importance of proper management of personal health records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of workshops conducted ____ • Number of community leaders trained Male_____ Female_____ • Number of community members attending Male_____ Female_____
Train 3 volunteers living with HIV/AIDS and 2 volunteers affected by HIV/AIDS in 6 villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of training workshops conducted ____ • Number of PLHA volunteers trained ____ Male ____ Female ____ • Number of volunteers HIV-affected trained ____ Male ____ Female ____
Conduct a 5-day training on stigma reduction and protection of AIDS orphans inheritance rights to 18 care-givers and 27 youth (17 orphans included)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of training session conducted ____ • Total number of people trained__ Male____ Female____ • No. of orphans care-givers trained ____ Male ____ Female ____ • Number of youth trained ____ Male ____ Female ____ • Number of orphans trained ____ Male ____ Female ____
Conduct meetings on stigma with secondary and high school teachers and students in 8 schools in Berea and Maseru in 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of secondary school teachers trained ____ Male ____ Female ____ • Number of high school teachers trained ____ Male ____ Female ____ • Number of secondary students trained ____ Male____ Female____ • Number of high school students trained ____ Male____ Female____
Act as a Support Group to 10 people living with HIV/AIDS by visiting them and their families twice a week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of people living with HIV and AIDS visited twice a week _____ Male ____ Female ____