



**the samdi**

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Department:  
SA Management Development Institute  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Monitoring and Evaluation  
Report on National Focus Groups**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
<b>Public Service and Administration</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>National Treasury</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Department of Water Affairs and Forestry</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Department of Provincial and Local Government</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Social Development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Public Service Commission</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Minerals and Energy</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Trade and Industry</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>South African Management Development Institute</b>	<b>1</b>

### ***Introduction***

Two focus groups were held at South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI), each lasting approximately two hours. They were led by Dr Ros Hirschowitz, an independent consultant for SAMDI, and observed by Marisa Labuschagne, a SAMDI staff member. The proceedings were both minuted and recorded, but the groups did not take place behind one-way viewing facilities as is customary for these types of sessions, since the discussion was not focused on sensitive personal issues. The composition of the groups varied by: type of department, level of appointment of the participant, and their race and sex. This made for interesting and lively discussions.

### ***Definitions of monitoring and evaluation***

There was, in general, a shared understanding of definitions of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Monitoring was seen as a continuous process to track the progress of services, projects and programmes, and to modify them if necessary, whereas evaluation was seen as a more periodic activity, with a focus on the assessment of results or interim results, leading to improvements in future planning and implementation.

Evaluation was also seen as involving the making of judgements about whether or not the goals of a particular intervention had been met, and the impact of the particular intervention on the lives of people. An intervention can have intended and unintended consequences. Thus assessment of the impact of the intervention is essential. An important purpose of evaluation mentioned by the participants was to assist in informed decision-making about improvements of services offered to the public.

### ***Levels, types and purposes of M&E***

The levels at which M&E could take place that were mentioned were as follows: (a) the policy level; (b) the strategy level; (c) the programme level; and (d) the implementation of services and projects level.

Regarding the type of M&E, in the first group, there was some discussion of goal-free evaluation as one model that could be used, but it was seen as only as one possible method among others. In general, the groups agreed that M&E should be tailored to the level and purpose of the intervention. In government, the general idea was to evaluate whether specific goals had been attained in relation to indicators.

In general, the feeling was expressed that the approach or philosophy of each department to its work, and particularly the approach of the Director General, influenced the type of M&E, its level and the way in which it was applied in that department. For example, in some departments, it may be advisable to have an M&E component in each section, and then an integrating M&E component at a higher level to bring the various tasks of M&E together. In others, a separate M&E component could be sufficient.

The following concepts were seen in relative terms by the participants in the focus group discussions: (a) inputs, (b) activities, (c) outputs, (d) outcomes and (e) impacts. What could be seen as an output for one department could be seen as an input for another. For

example, an output in education at a provincial level such as the pass rate could be seen as an input at national level for estimation of general pass rates throughout the country.

### ***Conceptual issues that were raised in relation to M&E***

Differences between the terms: (a) monitoring, (b) evaluations, (c) audits, (d) appraisals, (e) assessments, (f) quality assurance, (g) research and (h) reporting were often not clear; sometimes in theory and sometimes when applying them in practice. This ambiguity occurred particularly when there was role confusion; for example, if a different component within a department was responsible for appraisal, while another was responsible for research, and yet another for M&E, this situation could lead to confusion.

The general feeling was that M&E contains all of the aspects mentioned above. Research components within a department, for example, should work together with M&E practitioners, and collect information for them.

### ***Links between M&E and other functions in departments***

The point was stressed by both groups that both monitoring and evaluation should be directly linked to all planning activities and to performance appraisal activities. This led to some discussion of the positioning of the M&E component within the organisation. M&E is often separated from planning. It is also sometimes separated from research and development, and from performance appraisal.

Cooperation across a department was considered to be difficult, in view of the hierarchical structure within departments, and the focus on a specific work area by one component to the exclusion of others. The resentment of the new M&E components by older components, for example, the existing research component in one department, or the HR component concerned with appraisal in other, was raised.

If the DG of a particular department sees M&E as a transversal system across all components of work, then it has a much better chance of succeeding. This led to the conclusion that one important aspect of capacity-building was ***advocacy***.

### ***The structure of the M&E components within departments***

The way in which, and the levels at which, M&E components were structured differed from department to department. Below are some selected examples of these differences:

- In the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), the Deputy Director for M&E reported to the Director of Water Sector Programme Management Support. There are M&E components for the various Directorates.
- In Treasury, there was a Director of Knowledge and Research (including M&E), reporting to the Chief Director of Performance Information Management, who in turn reported to the Deputy Director General of Public Finance.
- In the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), and the Department for Public Service and Administration, M&E was the responsibility of a Chief Director.
- In Education, at national level, there was a Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, reporting to a Chief Director of Information and Monitoring. At the

- provincial level, M&E functions are located in different units, and in some provincial education departments there is no dedicated M&E unit.
- In Agriculture, the M&E section reports to the Chief Operating Officer.
  - In Housing, there is a Deputy Director General Responsible for M&E, under whom are located four Chief Directorates – M&E, research, information management and policy development.

The one common feature was the hierarchical nature of the structure. This was the main difficulty for people in M&E components at a lower level than DDG, or sometimes Chief Director, to form links with planning, performance appraisal, research, management information and other components that directly impact on the work of M&E.

Structures of M&E sections in departments may have implications for capacity-building, since the ability to apply what is learnt in M&E training in the work situation may be inhibited by lack of authority to implement such knowledge in practice.

### ***Essential links to be made between M&E and other aspects of work***

When discussing the type of competencies that M&E practitioners in government required in order to do their work efficiently and effectively, the ability to link the following aspects of work in general with the specific work of M&E practitioners were outlined:

- The ability to link M&E concepts with other concepts applicable to good governance. For example, the ability to link M&E with organisational and individual performance and appraisal was emphasised. This type of link needs to happen from the level of Director General (DG) level, cascading downwards, since the DG's contract includes the goals of the department, on the basis of which indicators can be developed.
- The abilities to develop indicators based on the specific goals of each component of the department, and to develop indicators for the specific target groups for whom each goal is intended, were also stressed.
- The ability to link M&E to all forms of reporting that is required by the government, including financial reporting; annual reports; quarterly reports; and other types of reports was also discussed.
- The ability to link M&E with quality assurance and to use management information systems as part of monitoring progress of a project was mentioned. The opinion was expressed that monitoring was similar to quality assurance, and the principles of quality assurance could equally apply to M&E.
- An essential linkage that was mentioned concerned department-wide and specific planning in relation to M&E. Participants stressed that plans and priorities should determine the type of baseline data to be collected or used for a specific intervention, and the actual process of collecting baseline data for that intervention. The initial plans and the baseline data should also link to the collection of data to estimate outcomes and impacts. Feedback from these M&E activities should then inform and influence improvements in future planning.

### ***Concerns that were raised in relation to effective M&E practice***

The following concerns were raised in relation to the role that M&E practitioners are playing at the moment:

- At present, interventions are started without any situational analysis or even the collection of baseline data. M&E specialists are called in to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the intervention, without this type of background information.
- People work within specific boundaries without all the necessary expertise, and therefore are prone to making mistakes. For example, a water project ran into difficulty when boreholes were not dug deeply enough because the social aspects of water supply were considered without taking the technical aspects of groundwater supply into account.
- An integrated approach in government is essential if M&E is to be successful. Often integration may take place at higher levels of government, for example through the cluster system, but people in departments work in isolation. Cross-sectoral committees are needed, even at lower levels of government, for M&E to be successful.
- People tend to be very territorial and protective of their turf, hindering the effective practice of M&E especially when looking at outcomes and impact. Ways of sharing experiences across departments are required.
- It is difficult, as an M&E specialist, to attribute a specific outcome to a specific intervention, since many other factors come into play. For example, better health may be due to good rainfall for crop growing in a specific area of the country, and not to the supply of clean water. Yet this type of impact assessment seems to be what is expected from M&E specialists.
- The buy-in of politicians and managers is essential if M&E is to succeed in government.
- The quality of data was raised as a major concern. This applied particularly to self-reported data, where there were no validity checks.
- Updating and maintenance of data sets, for example, the updating of PERSAL, and the way in which it is done was another concern raised.

#### *Access to data sets*

A very specific worry that the participants raised was the lack of access to data sets of other departments, or even access to a data set within a particular department, to enable M&E specialists to do their work effectively. For example, it is almost impossible for someone in education to gain access to the data bases of social development, and vice versa.

The suggestion was made that there should be a central repository where all data sets and other information is stored specifically for M&E practitioners.

#### *Essential subject matter to be included in training*

1. **Indicator development and measurement;** The training requirements for M&E should include not only how to measure existing indicators, but also how to develop new indicators relevant to a specific intervention. Training should include:

- a. A shared understanding of the concept of indicators and what they are meant to measure;
  - b. How to develop different types of indicators, including: input, process, activity; output, outcome and impact indicators;
  - c. How to reduce a theoretical indicator into something that is observable and/or measurable; and
  - d. How to relate indicators to the goals and objectives of an intervention.
- 2. Using existing data sources for measuring change**
- a. Using existing registers, for example, the population register, the register of births and deaths;
  - b. Using district health information systems;
  - c. Using administrative records, for example school attendance;
  - d. Using annual reports for M&E purposes;
  - e. Using existing data bases, for example data collected by social development on pensions and other grants (SOCPEN);
  - f. Using census and survey data of Stats SA; and
  - g. Using data from existing systems, for example PERSAL, BAS, LOGIS and Vulindlela.
- 3. Survey research principles and methods;** the following are essential in learning about how to do research based on surveys (the training should include not only household surveys, but also other types of surveys, such as surveys among schools and other learning institutions, surveys among community organisations, etc.):
- a. Understanding sampling methods and drawing a sample appropriate to measuring the indicators of the intervention;
  - b. Developing a questionnaire or other measuring instruments;
  - c. Methods of collecting data, including, but not only, conducting fieldwork.
  - d. Methods of assuring that data collected are of good quality.
  - e. Methods of data capture, including editing and data cleaning.
  - f. Range and consistency checks, and imputations, if necessary.
- 4. Taking time lags and other aspects of time into consideration in M&E**
- a. Methods of conducting panel surveys;
  - b. Methods of collecting longitudinal data;
  - c. Time series analysis; and
  - d. Trend analysis.
- 5. Qualitative research methods**
- a. Case studies;
  - b. Focus groups;
  - c. Goal-free analysis;
  - d. Gap analysis;
  - e. Rapid appraisals; and
  - f. Participatory research methods.

## **6. Other M&E methods**

- a. Definitions of M&E concepts;
- b. Developing M&E standards;
- c. Identifying specific target groups for interventions;
- d. Measuring the quality of life and improvements in life quality;
- e. Performance contracts and appraisals in relation to M&E;
- f. Using human resources data on vacancy rates, absenteeism, leave, compensation, etc. for M&E purposes;
- g. Tracking expenditure and collecting other financial data;
- h. Communication skills; and
- i. Using operational data, for example using information collected about clients who require social services.

## **7. Collecting background information**

- a. Undertaking a situational analysis before embarking on an intervention, then during the intervention and afterwards.
- b. Collecting baseline data;
- c. Collecting data about the specific environment in which the intervention is taking place before, during and after the intervention, for example attitude studies, approaches to change.

## **8. Evaluation methods where there is no baseline**

- a. Retrospective studies;
- b. Risk assessment;
- c. Case-control methods used in epidemiology;
- d. Understanding of intervening variables and their impact.

## **9. Methods of ensuring that high quality data are collected**

- a. A clear understanding of data quality and an ability to evaluate data;
- b. Setting quality standards;
- c. Estimating the reliability of data;
- d. Checking on the validity of data;
- e. Ensuring accuracy of the data;
- f. Ensuring that clear definitions of concepts are given with the data;
- g. Statistical estimations of precision of the data.

## **10. Impact analysis**

- a. Specific emphasis was placed on undertaking impact analyses, particularly in relation to understanding intended and unintended effects.
- b. There is a need to have training on how to assess the environment in which the intervention is taking place.

## **11. Methods of storing and retrieving data**

- a. Developing data warehouses;
- b. Gaining access to data from these warehouses;

- c. Interpreting data from different sources, taking collection methodologies into account.

**12. Methods of evaluating the quality of and using existing data; including:**

- a. Existing survey data sets,
- b. Annual reports and other reports submitted to users by departments,
- c. Registers such as the population register, and
- d. Administrative records, such as school attendance records.

**13. Data analysis and report-writing**

- a. Basic statistical principles;
- b. Designing tabulation plans;
- c. Preparing tables;
- d. Interpreting tables;
- e. Writing user-friendly narrative reports;
- f. Drawing graphs and other ways of presenting data in a usable format.

**14. Advocacy**

- a. Communication skills; and
- b. Networking principles.

***Concerns that were raised in relation to service providers***

The following concerns were raised in relation to universities, educational institutions and other M&E training service providers:

- There is a lack of understanding of the way in which government functions among people doing training for M&E.
- There is also the practice to take training that has been developed for very different situations in other countries directly into South Africa, without taking out country's specific circumstances and culture into account. This applies particularly to donor agencies giving M&E training.
- Standardised M&E manuals may be of assistance in enabling people to do their work more effectively, since M&E is relatively new in South Africa.

***M&E internships***

The suggestion was made that an M&E internship programme for government employees in M&E, since this may be the best way of learning to apply knowledge acquired in training to the actual situation.

***Target groups for M&E training***

Project managers will require short training focused mainly on monitoring;

Programme managers will require training in how to use M&E data;

Senior managers will require M&E training as policy implementers and data users.

Specialist training will be required for M&E practitioners.