



# Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation System Assessment Tool

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2013

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# Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation System Assessment Tool

FRAMEWORK AND OPERATIONAL GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

2013

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# Introduction

A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system can simply be defined as a system designed to guide the process of collecting, analyzing, and using data with the purpose of measuring and documenting achievements as well as continually informing program planning and policy decisions. As such, it is crucial to programs and projects that efficient and effective M&E systems are put in place to guide this complex cycle. FHI 360 recognizes the importance and expected outcome of M&E systems, not only in producing high quality data, but also in ensuring that the necessary human and financial resources, infrastructure, equipment and supplies, and capacity of the underlying system are in place to support the production, analysis, and use of data. With this in mind the M&E System Assessment Tool was developed to support programs and projects improve the quality and effectiveness of their M&E systems.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE M&E SYSTEM ASSESSMENT TOOL**

The overarching aim of this tool is to strengthen the quality of program and/or project M&E systems.

Specifically, the tool has been designed to:

- Provide a comprehensive overview of the functionality, strengths, and weaknesses of a program/project M&E system, and chart a course for its future development
- Promote alignment between program/project, national, regional, and global data needs;
- Build capacity in M&E systems analysis and improvement;

- Promote ongoing M&E systems development and evolution within a common framework of standards;
- Identify human resource and capacity building needs for a well-functioning M&E system;
- Help to develop specific quality improvement plans to strengthen the M&E system.

## **HOW TO USE THIS TOOL**

The M&E System Assessment Tool is a generic tool developed as a diagnostic exercise for programs and projects to critically examine their M&E systems, identify areas performing well and critical gaps, and develop a quality improvement plan to maintain

strengths and overcome weaknesses in their M&E system. Furthermore, repeated implementation of the M&E System Assessment Tool can provide snapshots of the extent of improvements in the M&E system over time. This tool can also be used as a checklist for program/project design and implementation to ensure that minimum standards for a functional M&E system are put in place (Appendix II outlines steps to establishing a functional M&E system). It can be used in M&E training, as technical guidance, or to identify needs for technical assistance and capacity building activities. As such, we recommend that this tool be used within the first year of program/project start-up and annually or bi-annually throughout the life of the program/project to continually assess and inform the functionality of the M&E system.

### ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK

The organizing framework for M&E System Assessment Tool is based upon the UNAIDS 12 Components of a Functional National M&E System<sup>1</sup>, which outlines the people, partnerships, and planning to support data collection and use, the mechanisms through which data are collected, verified, and

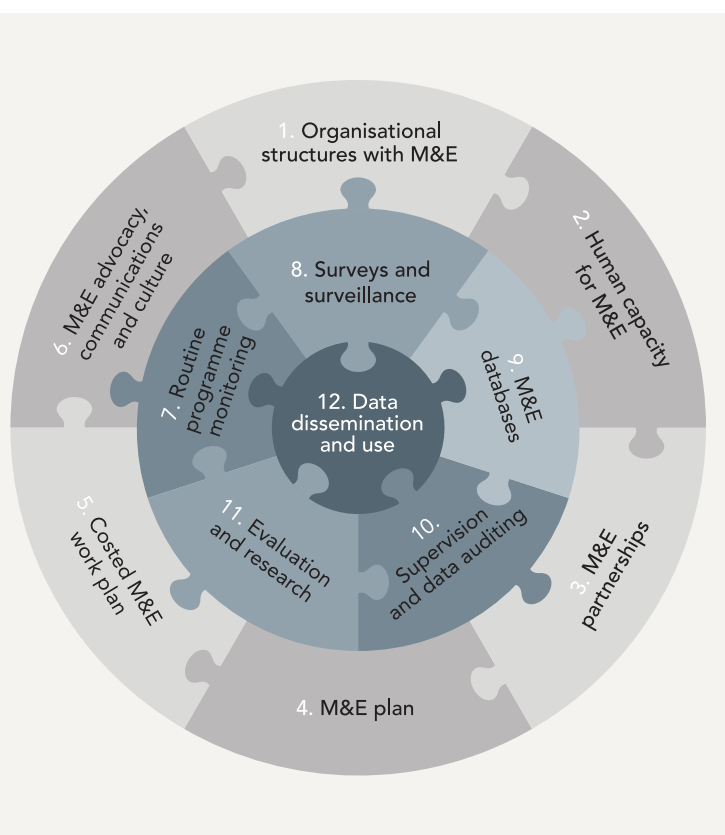
analyzed, and the use of data for decision-making. While this framework was initially developed and applied to national M&E systems, many of the key elements can be applied to M&E systems in general.

While most, if not all, categories at the national level are equally important at the program level, for program-level use we have condensed the 12 categories into 8 domains, with a brief explanation of what key question(s) each domain attempts to answer as outlined in the Program-level M&E System Assessment Framework below:

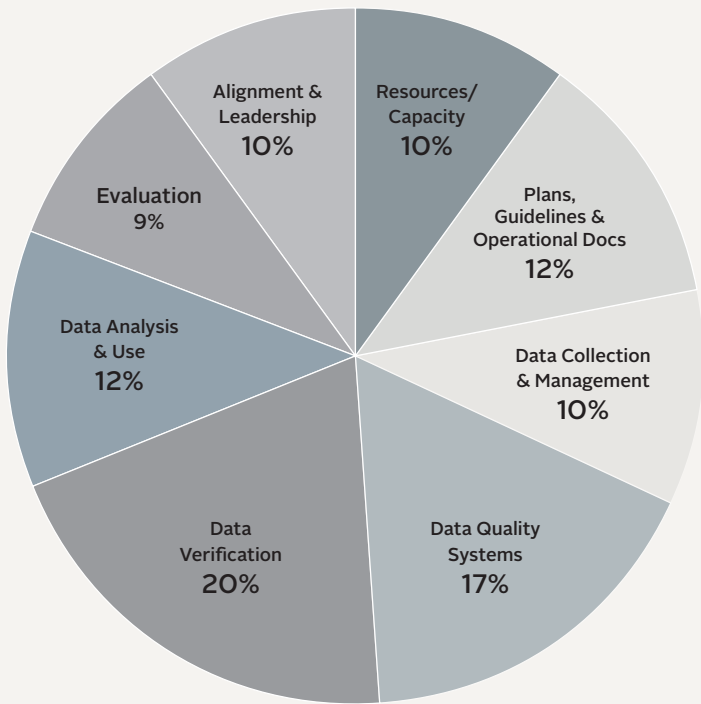
- 1. Resources and Capacity Building:** Is M&E adequately resourced? Have staff received training and mentoring?
- 2. Documentation:** Is there adequate documentation for the M&E System?
- 3. Data Collection & Management:** Is there a well-functioning Data Collection & Management System?
- 4. Data Quality Systems:** Are processes and systems in place to generate quality data?
- 5. Data Verification:** Are results reported accurate and can they be substantiated?
- 6. Data Analysis and Use:** Are data well analyzed and used for program management and improvement?
- 7. Evaluation:** Is there adequate planning, implementation and use of evaluations?
- 8. Alignment & leadership:** Is the Program M&E aligned with the National M&E system? Does the Program demonstrate Technical Leadership in M&E?

### RELATIVE WEIGHTING

Overall weighting is determined by the number of questions/filters within each of the 8 domains. The weights of 6 out of the 8 domains are fairly evenly distributed (comprising 9 – 12% of the overall score); however data verification (20%) and data quality systems (17%) together contribute 37% to the overall score, reflecting the increased importance currently given to data quality among national, regional, and global stakeholders. The relative weights of each domain may be modified to reflect changing needs and/or priorities by either (1) increasing or decreasing the total number of questions and filters in each domain or (2) including subjective weights for each domain.



<sup>1</sup>UNAIDS 12 Components of a Functional National M&E System, 2008.



## METHODOLOGY

This tool is a facilitated self-assessment, using a standards based checklist. For each standard, a means of verification is suggested, which provides a method for objectively verifying the extent to which each standard is met. This verification is important for grounding the results in evidence, and reducing desirability bias from the self-assessment process. Detailed steps for implementing the tool follow below starting on page 5.

This tool can be used together with FHI 360's Participatory Data Verification and Improvement Tool (DVT) (2013) to guide the data verification domain.

## SCORING

To complete the checklist, the majority of standards rely on some form of documentation and/or interview with key staff at program and site levels. Scores are allocated for performance of the system against each identified standard on a scale from 0 – 2, where:

**N/A** = standard is not applicable, or not available for review purposes

**0** = standard is not met

**1** = standard is partially met

**2** = standard is fully met

The exception to this is the data verification domain, which has a higher scoring pattern for each standard to emphasize the importance of data quality.

Scores for each of the 8 domains are generated, together with an overall score. Following the assessment, recommendations are generated and a participatory prioritization exercise occurs. The priority recommendations then form the basis for a quality improvement plan.

## DURATION

The process for completing the M&E System Assessment varies depending on the size of the program. Small programs should anticipate the process lasting 2 – 3 days; medium to large programs where a number of sites may be visited in different geographical areas should plan for up to 5 days.

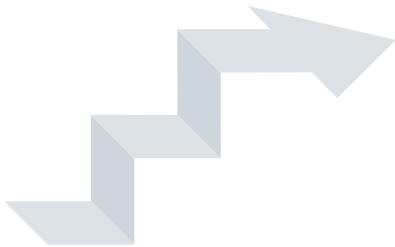
## FREQUENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION

For programs lasting between 3 and 5 years, this tool should be implemented by the end of Year 1 and every 12 – 18 months thereafter. Assessment results should be tracked over time to demonstrate progress in improving the M&E system over the life of the project.

## LIMITATIONS

As the selection of indicators and other issues for verification is not random, the snapshot of M&E system functionality gained during one assessment may not be representative of the entire M&E system. Additionally, there is a level of skill in the type of issues probed under each standard (i.e. means of verification selected). This means experienced assessors who know common system vulnerabilities or audit findings in other settings may probe for and pick up more weaknesses or vulnerabilities than less experienced assessors. Furthermore, some weaknesses are more important to overall system integrity than others, so the effectiveness of the process relies on the assessment team being able to prioritize the most important issues accordingly, and prepare a coherent and realistic plan to fill the gaps.

*“The assessment provides a snapshot of the program M&E system... due to the short time and small sample of issues covered during the assessment, including indicators selected for verification, the results may not be generalizable to the entire program-wide M&E system.”*



# Key Steps

## in Conducting an M&E System Assessment

### STEP 1: PREPARATION

**a. Team formation** – The team should be composed of at least two people, including the assessment lead and M&E lead for the program. In-briefs and out-briefs (see Appendix I for sample agenda) provide an opportunity to involve senior managers. Ideally a person external to the program M&E team should be the leader, particularly if it is the first assessment.

**b. Review of secondary documents** – Documents may include the project proposal/design document, M&E plan/PMP, recent donor reports, M&E data collection tools, service delivery guidance documents, and reports of evaluations.

**c. Send program team the M&E System**

**Assessment tool** – Give sufficient lead time for translation where necessary.

**d. Selection of sites to visit** – Between 2 and 4 sites can be selected. Sites can be selected either randomly or purposively covering priority or higher volume sites.

**e. Selection of indicators to verify** – Approximately 5 indicators should be selected. To avoid biasing this part of the assessment, choose the indicator and report period (e.g. a month, quarter, or 6

### Recommended Profile for Assessment Team Leader:

- Good knowledge of relevant donor M&E guidelines (e.g. PEPFAR)
- Facilitation skills
- Data auditing skills/experiences
- Intermediate to advanced knowledge of program monitoring and evaluation
- Experience in managing, overseeing or providing technical assistance to a program M&E system
- Knowledge/experience with the similar type of program is an advantage

month period, within the last 1 year) to verify before visiting the site.

### STEP 2: IMPLEMENTATION

Appendix I provides a sample agenda for conducting the assessment in a medium to large program.

Key implementation stages are as follows:

- a. Introductory briefing with management team** – The purpose of the briefing is to orient

the management team on the purpose of the assessment, methods, and tools used.

**b. Implementation of office-based assessment –**

Over 80% of the assessment can be filled in through discussions and document review at the program office. Allow 1 - 2 days for this. As it is a self-assessment, the program M&E lead should have the latitude to determine the final rating

against each standard. The external facilitator can help ground these ratings (i.e. enhance objectivity) through the selection of examples to verify.

**c. Site/field visits –** Site visits are necessary primarily for the data verification component of the checklist, as well as certain standards where 'partner' is listed under means of verification.

*Example:*

1. There is an M&E plan (or PMP) which is up to date				
Records review	NA	NM	PM	FM

**SCORING THIS STANDARD:**

The M&E lead should produce a copy of the current M&E plan or PMP for the program. Note that in this example, the standard does not seek to measure the quality of the PMP, merely whether it is up to date; there are, however, other standards for examining the adequacy of the PMP.

- ◇ A 'fully met (FM)' rating for this standard would signify that the M&E plan/PMP is current at the time (month/year) of the assessment.
- ◇ A 'partially met (PM)' rating for this standard could be given if there are new indicators or reporting requirements from the program donor or host government, which have not yet been incorporated into the M&E plan/PMP.
- ◇ A 'not met (NM)' rating for this standard could be given if there was no M&E plan/PMP being used by the program/project.
- ◇ Note that in this example, 'not applicable (N/A)' is not an appropriate score for an unavailable M&E plan/PMP since every program/project should have an M&E plan or PMP available to project staff. In some cases, 'N/A' might be appropriate, for example, if budget information was unavailable at the time of the assessment.

**STEP 3: ANALYSIS AND FOLLOW UP**

**a. Final scoring and analysis –** A score (%) is generated for each domain and overall. The results can be analyzed in a time-series to illustrate progress over time or persistent gaps, or compared between different programs to highlight relative strengths and weaknesses. During analysis, this limitation has to be mentioned explicitly. The comments section provides an opportunity to contextualize or better explain each result, and the most important observations and recommendations should be included on the summary sheet.

**b. Prioritization of recommendations and work plan –** After the assessment is complete, the next step is to agree on recommendations, prioritize

the most important, and prepare a work plan with sub-activities, responsibilities, and timelines for each key recommendation.

**c. Debrief with management team –** The purpose of the debrief is to present findings and recommendations as well as to obtain senior management support for the important next steps.

**d. Communication of findings and follow-up –** The summary sheet should be distributed to the management team following the debrief. Follow-up efforts should be based largely on progress against the work plan, however there may be important recommendations not prioritized by the team that still need support post-assessment.



# Appendix I: Sample Program M&E Assessment Agenda

## 5 DAY VERSION

Time	Activity	Location	Attendees
<b>Sunday</b>	Assessment team arrives		
<b>Monday</b>			
8:15AM – 10:15AM	Meeting with management team: Present purpose of Assessment, tools used, and schedule Overview of the program Overview of the M&E system	Program office	M&E assessment team & Program Management/Technical Team
10:30AM – 12:00PM	Initial team meeting to review documents, tool, agenda and logistics	Program office	M&E assessment team (references to 'team' includes M&E lead for program)
12:10PM – 1:00PM	Lunch		M&E assessment team
2:00PM – 5:00PM	Start office based assessment	Program office	M&E assessment team
<b>Tuesday</b>			
8:30AM - 12:30PM	Continue office based assessment	Program office	M&E assessment team
12:30PM – 1:30PM	Lunch	Restaurant TBD	
1:30PM – 5:00PM	Continue office based assessment	Program office	M&E assessment team
5:00PM	Travel to District X		M&E assessment team
<b>Wednesday</b>			
9:00AM–11:00PM	Meeting with Partner 1	Site 1, partner office	M&E assessment team, partner 1 team
12:00PM – 1:00PM	Lunch		
1:00PM- 4:00PM	Meeting with Partner 2	Site 2, partner office	M&E assessment team, partner 2 team
<b>Thursday</b>			
8 :15 AM – 9 :00 AM	Travel back to program headquarters		
10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Meet with Partner 3	Site 3, partner office	M&E assessment team, partner 3 team
1:00 PM – 2:00 PM	Lunch		

Time	Activity	Location	Attendees
2:00PM – 5:00PM	Wrap up of office based assessment	Program office	M&E assessment team
<b>Friday</b>			
8:15AM – 10:30AM	Review and prioritize recommendations with program M&E team	Program office	M&E assessment team
10:30- 12:00pm	Debrief: Discuss M&E Assessment findings and recommendations, Review and amend findings/recommendations as needed; Agree on next steps	Program office	M&E assessment team & Program Management/Technical Team
12:00PM – 1:00PM	Lunch		
2:00PM – 4:00PM	Prepare detailed M&E quality improvement work plan based on priority recommendations	Program office	M&E assessment team
<b>Saturday</b>			
	M&E assessment team departs		

# Appendix II: Establishing a Functional M&E System

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Design of a functional M&E system is a participatory and collaborative process that may involve a number of key actors, including but not limited to the country office M&E lead, program/project technical staff, the donor, and staff from FHI 360 headquarters, IPs, and CBOs. The roles of these key players elaborate a systematic approach to ensuring a sound M&E foundation is established and implemented from project/program start-up to close-out.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Headquarters**

- Support the CO in establishing an M&E system, as needed
- Provide in-country and virtual TA to Cos throughout the LOP, as needed

### **Country Office M&E Team**

- Establish program/project M&E system
- Provide TA to IPs in M&E system processes and guidelines
- Support IPs in establishing an M&E Plan and annual workplans, including data verification
- Provide supportive supervision and onsite mentoring and coaching to IPs
- Provide TA to host governments entities in M&E system assessments and data verification
- Conduct periodic M&E System Assessments and routine data verification; ensure improvement plan development and follow-up

### **Implementing Partners**

- Provide TA to CBOs/sites in M&E system processes and guidelines
- Support CBOs/sites in developing annual workplans, including plans for data verification
- Provide supportive supervision and onsite mentoring and coaching to CBOs/sites
- Conduct regular internal data verification activities and ensure improvement plan development and follow-up

### **Role of CBOs/sites:**

- Conduct frontline data collection using standardized tools
- Where electronic systems are available, enter data into the database
- Request M&E technical support in areas of need
- Conduct regular internal data verification activities and ensure improvement plan development and follow-up



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