

Guidance for Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

This is part of a series of Guidance notes designed to assist users of the Effective Collaborative Action methodology. You can find the full methodology [here](#).

This Guidance provides advice on designing a participatory monitoring system that serves both measuring learning and tracking our joint commitments, while also reporting and communicating internally and externally to strengthen collective, individual and systemic learning.

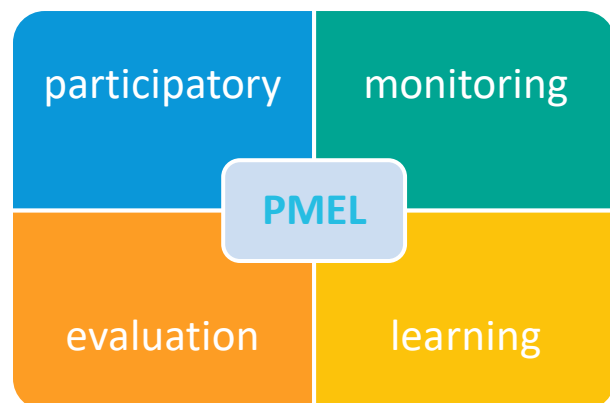
Introduction

Often, in collaborative efforts - an alliance, partnership, multi-stakeholder platform or dialogue - monitoring progress and learning are left until the end, it is not budgeted or resourced sufficiently, and it is done top-down without ensuring stakeholder participation. Conventionally, evaluation involves external experts. In contrast, participatory monitoring involves stakeholders as active participants in tracking the progress but also in integrating learning collectively.

This guidance is does not tell you how to develop a monitoring system. It has been written with the assumption that the user has a basic understanding and knowledge of Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems or can rely on external advice to develop it.

Focus on recognising that stakeholders must play a central role in the monitoring and learning process. They do this by defining for themselves their own measures of success for the process, which reflect the fulfilment of their shared vision, their commitments, their perspectives and aspirations.

We offer a series of principles, options for approaches, tools and examples that aim to guide both the Backbone Support Team and the actions stakeholders need to take in the design and development of their participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning system (PMEL). It is suggested to use and adapt what is appropriate in the context of the collaborative effort. This Guidance is not meant to be a recipe or a step-by-step guide.



This is living guidance. We encourage feedback from anyone who is developing and applying a participatory monitoring system in a collaborative effort. Share your ideas and experiences with us – methodology.feedback@undp.org.

Recommended Principles

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." - Xunzi (Xun Kuang), "The Complete Text", chapter 8 " Ruxiao ("The Teachings of the Ru"). Third century B.C.E.

We recommend utilizing the following principles in developing a PMEL system to ensure it contributes to collective learning and adaptation:

- **Co-design the PMEL at the beginning of your collaborative process.** Monitoring and learning should be a part of the process throughout the initiative's life. Plan in advance learning and reporting. Incorporate into your process a reflective learning cycle: collection of data, evidence-based monitoring and evaluation, reporting of results, reflection, learning and adaptation moments. Don't leave learning practices to the end.
- **Use methods and language adapted to the participants' needs and interests.** Ensure that the system created attends to culture and context of those you are working with. Consider the pace, access and dynamics of the stakeholders. Be flexible and adapt as you learn what works.
- **Design the system as simple, practical and fun as possible.** Work with the backbone team and a group of stakeholders to co-create simple data collection methods and analysis techniques, but also attractive and engaging ways of monitoring and sharing learning, so that actors see value in applying the PMEL system.
- **Agree on the indicators you want to measure over time.** Collectively agreeing a maximum of 10 indicators to measure across everything.
- **Don't be afraid of mistakes.** Experiment in the development of the monitoring system, don't be afraid to think outside the box and learn along the way. Use mistakes to adapt your collaborative effort process.
- **Structure capacity building to strengthen participants skills in monitoring.** The PMEL system should include a plan to strengthen stakeholder capacity for regular, consistent reflection and learning at three levels- the individual, collective and system. Consider a varied offer

of training, coaching and peer learning, tailored to the readiness of the learners.

- **Foster enthusiasm and celebration of the collective and systemic learning.** Creating a collective culture of learning requires time, dedication and patience. Set up milestones to celebrate the accomplishments and learning to keep the momentum.
- **Always pay attention to gender and vulnerable and marginalized people.** Ensure that they are included, actively participate and contribute from their perspectives in the whole monitoring and learning process. Make sure that they are always involved and there is a balance in participation of all groups and particularly marginalised people and women
- **Always acknowledge the collective and individuals who contribute to the collaborative effort.**

Different Approaches to Consider

a. Awareness raising on participatory monitoring.

- Explain the purpose and benefit of monitoring progress for the collective growth. Do not expect full involvement of participants from the start; see the process in a natural organic way and be flexible. The participation and ownership of participants usually increases over time. Initially, the backbone team will have greater leadership in design, facilitation and implementation of the System, and as the collaborative action initiative progresses, that capacity will be transferred. A valuable practice is to create an PMEL Group with a mix of stakeholders and build up champions and agents of change capacity.
- At the beginning of your collaborative effort, dedicate time in sessions, between sessions or informal spaces to introduce concepts of monitoring, evaluation, learning, reflection and adaptation. Even in short processes of one day or an hour online, you can do this with a few questions at the beginning and end:
 - What are your hopes from today / this session?
 - What have you learned today?

- What worked well and what can be improved?
 - What might you do differently after today?
 - What is your top insight from today?
 - Use [virtual tools](#) such as *mentimeter*, *slido* or others to collect the insights of the participants at the beginning and end of the sessions. The advantage is that the results can be shown on the spot to show a collective reflection and you can keep these as records for the future.
 - The results of the monitoring and evaluation can be collected and shared in an on-line 1 or 2-page summary document with the main insights on: session objectives; the design; expectations from participants for this dialogue; on commitments and buy-in; design considerations for collaborative effort and next sessions.
 - At the beginning of each session, you could ask participants to share a key learning from or since the previous session.
- b. Develop and co-design a monitoring and evaluation system to track your commitments towards your shared vision.

In any process or project, a well-designed M&E system is critical for good management and accountability. A timely and reliable M&E provides evidence-based information to implement, learn and adapt, demonstrating progress and highlighting our accomplishments and achievements

Here are some scenarios for designing the PMEL plan:

- Your plan has to respond to the objectives, outcomes and indicators that were defined in the funding contract / original project design document. In this case, there may not be much room to co-design it with the participants. Nevertheless, do not miss the opportunity to socialise it with everyone. And adapt it using a participatory approach, instead of the traditional top-down by the backbone support team or by external consultants.
- There is an opportunity to co-design the plan. This is the ideal scenario; however, it is not usual that the conditions for doing so exist from the beginning. It may be that the backbone support team leads the initial

design of the M&E plan and as capacities are strengthened, participants become more active and involved. Thus, improving the system to best reflect their monitoring and learning needs and interests.

As with any M&E system, develop a protocol for collecting data needed to measure and assess progress. Make sure it incorporates quantitative and qualitative indicators that allow you to identify the level of progress and impact. For example, you can use a qualitative indicator approach to document early signals of change and support adaptive management for effective collaborative action. Other examples can be found below.

Make sure you consider existing reporting and learning practices as a base line for designing your plan. For example, ask participants:

- Are you collecting data, information and learnings? How?
- How do you usually share your lessons learned?
- Have you been trained on data collection, analysis and learning practices before?

c. Put the machinery to work. Implement the PMEL system.

Once the plan is designed, it is time to put it into action and nurture it. The PMEL Group can facilitate the implementation and act as champions of the process, encouraging others to actively participate and recognize the value of the reflection and action learning.

The aim is to move from top-down and external data collection to full participant involvement:

- Start by involving the participants as data collectors. The Backbone Support Team can develop simple instruments to collect data including spreadsheets, interviews and survey. If the capacity exists, use virtual tools and Apps in smart phones or other devices to gather information in a very practical way.
- Engage participants to analyse. You can start with the data and information analysis by the Group and with focus groups. This is a key exercise for participants to learn about the value of rigorous data, qualitative assessments and ultimately the rationale for monitoring.

- Participants collectively interpret and draw conclusions based on collected data and participatory analysis exercises. They analyse the present situations and outline future strategies and solutions that respond to what they have learned and reflected. Participants formulate their own conclusions.
- Develop focus trainings for building skills and capacity to support the process. Define the different roles of the stakeholders, PMEL Group, Backbone Support team and others. Not all stakeholders need to participate at all times. You can establish cycles of participation and rotate roles as well.
- Visit the [Guidance on Signals of Change for Effective Collaborative Action](#) to explore options for holding virtual or face-to-face sessions for applying the tool than can be also applied to other contexts.

d. Tell the story.

Share your successes but also your failures and lessons from both. Options to do that:

- Usually, funding contracts have their own reporting requirements and report formats. Normally the Backbone Support Team is responsible for this task.
- For other audiences, be creative. For example, visual tools and storytelling is a good and powerful way to share with others. Make sure to have a social communication specialist in the team. See below some examples on using videos and testimonies and how telling the story increased community engagement in work of M&E.
- If possible, capture lessons in an on-line system and make it public.
- Invest in writing your lessons in a peer-reviewed publication format.
- Train on skills to share and present impact, learnings and stories to create individual and collective confidence. In order to do that, develop tailor trainings to the type of audience.

- Develop a confidential protocol to address the specific concerns of some sectors that are not in a position to share certain information publicly, particularly for recording interviews and testimonies.

Tools and examples

On design a Participatory M&E&L system:

<http://www.managingforimpact.org/tool/participatory-impact-assessment-and-learning-approach-piala>

<https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Participatory-ME.pdf>

<https://www.saferspaces.org.za/learn-how/entry/participatory-monitoring-and-evaluation>

On monitoring for learning:

<https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/me-learning>

On monitoring commodities action plans:

Spreadsheet to [monitor the action plan on a National Commodity Platform](#).

On report and share:

Interesting example on collective reporting on commitment in a visual and practical manner https://www.sustaincoffee.org/assets/resources/SCC_2019-Commitments-Hub-Report.pdf

Captivating methods to tell the story

<https://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/digital-storytelling-capturing-lives-creating-community>

Telling the story as powerful for community engagement

<https://aea365.org/blog/our-story-is-their-story-increasing-community-engagement-in-project-monitoring-in-the-community-of-tumbit-melayu-in-berau-indonesia-by-miki-tsukamoto/>

On use of participatory video:

To engage participants: <https://aea365.org/blog/yfe-week-julie-poncelet-catherine-borgman-arboleda-and-jorge-arboleda-on-using-participatory-video-to-engage-youth-in-evaluation-in-a-creative-and-empowering-way/>

<https://insightshare.org/resources/participatory-video-and-the-most-significant-change/>

<https://www.cominit.com/content/insights-participatory-video-handbook-field>

Case studies

<https://www.wur.nl/en/newsarticle/food-systems-transformation-demands-new-approach-to-monitoring-and-evaluation.htm>

<https://www.saferspaces.org.za/learn-how/entry/setting-the-scene-for-participation#Tools>

