Oxfam GB Programme Monitoring Reviews

Mandatory Requirements and Support Materials

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Mandatory Requirements

Introduction

Monitoring is the systematic assessment of a programme's performance over time. It is a collaborative process between Oxfam staff, partners and communities to review what has taken place, to identify changes that have occurred, and to consider whether the programme has contributed to these changes. Monitoring Reviews are regular learning events for programme staff and partners to reflect upon information gathered through monitoring activities, to analyse what it is saying about their programme and the context in which it operates, and to decide what that means for their future work. All programmes must hold at least two Monitoring Reviews per year and all Monitoring Reviews must meet the following requirements:

1. Monitoring Reviews must link with programme plans

In order to monitor progress towards a desired change and to assess the contribution of a programme to this change, the following are required:

- Clear statements of intended change;
- Explicit and valid assumptions about the relationship between programme activities and intended change;
- A clear work plan showing what will happen, by when and by whom;
- Relevant markers of action (milestones), and measures of change (indicators);
- Key sources of information for monitoring milestones and indicators.

Information should be collected when it makes sense to measure progress against the programme's work plan and indicators of change. Monitoring Reviews should be timed to fit with these monitoring activities, so that information is ready to be analysed and to inform programme discussions and decisions by staff and partners.

2. Monitoring Reviews must be based on reliable monitoring information

Programme decisions should be based on a sound knowledge of what is and isn't working towards the intended change. This means that reliable monitoring information about the programme must be collected during field visits prior to Monitoring Reviews, carefully recorded without bias, and presented and communicated in an accessible way during Monitoring Review meetings to enable all participants to reflect upon, analyse and learn from the same information.

3. Monitoring Reviews must include analysis of monitoring information, and time for reflection and learning by programme teams and partners

Programme staff and partners should meet to review the progress of their work towards intended change and to take decisions about how the programme can be improved. Each Monitoring Review should have clear objectives, be well facilitated and cover the following questions:

- What should we have achieved in the programme by now?
- What information have we gathered, how, and from whom?
- What's working well and why?
- What problems are there and how can they be solved?
- What have we learnt about: 1) the context of the programme 2) the programme area e.g. education 3) the monitoring process itself?
- What are we going to do about it?
- Who will take action and when?
- What will we feed into other reports and discussions?

4. Monitoring Reviews must be followed by actions and feedback

A summary of the Monitoring Review discussions and action points must be shared with key programme stakeholders, attached to the relevant PIP in OPAL, and taken forward as agreed.

Support Materials

1. Introduction

1.1 What is monitoring?

Monitoring is the systematic assessment of a programme's performance over time. It is a collaborative process between Oxfam staff, partners and communities to review what has happened and check intended and unintended changes and whether activities have contributed to those changes. Well planned, timely monitoring allows problems to be quickly identified and programme activities to be adapted in order to optimise their impact. Monitoring is more effective when it is a continuous process, included in the design of a programme and part of our day-to-day work.

1.2 What are Monitoring Reviews?

Monitoring Reviews are regular events for programme staff and partners to reflect upon the information gathered through monitoring activities: to analyse what it is saying about their programme and the context in which it operates, and to decide what it means for their future work. All programmes must hold at least two Monitoring Reviews per year and all Monitoring Reviews must meet four mandatory requirements:

1. Monitoring Reviews must link with programme plans
2. Monitoring Reviews must be based on reliable monitoring information
3. Monitoring Reviews must include analysis of monitoring information and time for reflection and learning by programme teams and partners
4. Monitoring Reviews must be followed by actions and feedback

1.3 Why do we monitor?

We monitor in order to check progress, support learning and be accountable for what we do and how we do it.

Monitoring is used to check what positive and negative, planned and unplanned changes are happening in the lives of people as the result of a programme. This is important so we can be transparent about what we do and so we can listen and respond to feedback about our work. Through monitoring we also check how partners have spent the money we give them, and hold them accountable for the commitments they make to poor people.

Monitoring is a means of recording progress against programme work plans and milestones, from which we can decide whether modification is needed to improve the programme. It can help us to learn from what we do, so we can do it better. Well planned, implemented and documented monitoring provides a good basis for a more in-depth review of longer-term and sustained impact. This helps us to be more accountable to the general public and to the donors who give us money.

Monitoring is also an opportunity to discuss the problems our partners are facing and the causes of these problems, and to support partners in solving them. It is therefore part of ongoing capacity-building and strengthens the relationships between programmes, partners and communities.

1.4 Who monitors?

Monitoring is part of good programme management and is therefore the responsibility of Programme Managers. However, a range of people such as Programme Officers, partners, community-based organisations and people living in poverty can be involved in gathering and analysing monitoring information. Monitoring Reviews provide the opportunity for all involved in a programme to develop a common understanding of what the programme is aiming to achieve, how it will be achieved and how it will be measured. To this end, Monitoring Reviews should actively involve partners and, where appropriate, members of the communities in which we work.

1.5 Where does it fit into Oxfam GB's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) System?

Monitoring Reviews are one of seven processes designed to enable us to **learn** across humanitarian, development and campaigns programmes and to **be accountable** to different stakeholders. In this system, Monitoring Reviews have been designed to facilitate programme level learning and every effort should be made to protect the time and space for this purpose. While some information from reviews may be useful for other purposes, such as marketing materials or management reports, the primary purpose of the Monitoring Review is to support learning amongst programme staff and partners. Please be warned that the use of Monitoring Reviews for secondary purposes will affect the focus and dynamic of the event - reducing the opportunities for learning and programme development and weakening the links between learning and action at programme levels. There are already strong internal reporting mechanisms for management accountability, and other processes within the MEL system have been designed to meet Oxfam GB's wider learning and accountability needs, such as Strategic Evaluations and Impact Assessments. This should mean that Monitoring Reviews are conducted to meet the particular requirements set for programme learning.

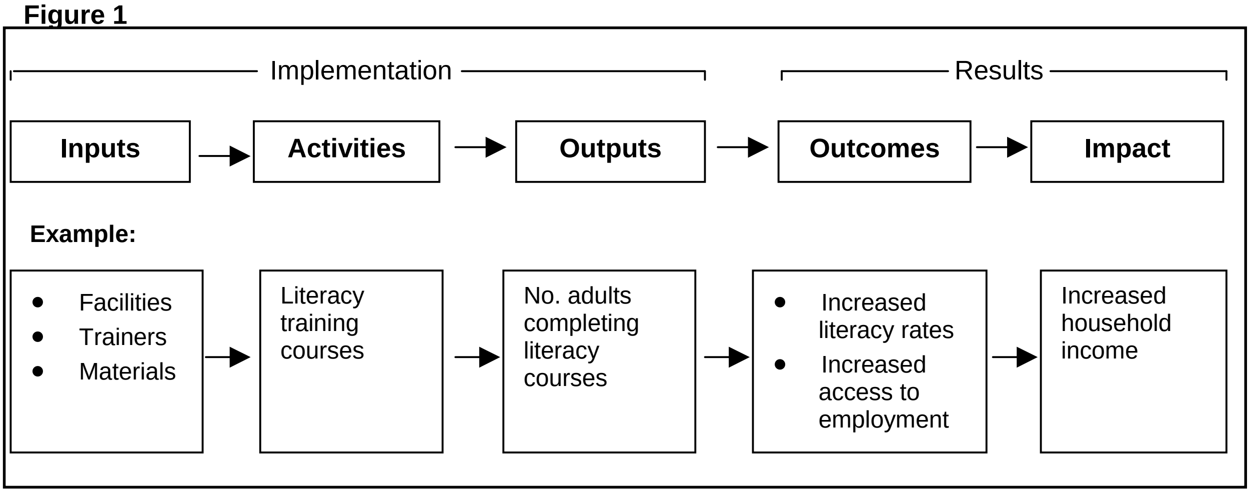
Lessons coming out of Monitoring Reviews will be made available to a wider audience. First, and most importantly, these lessons will be used by the local team to improve the effectiveness of their programme. Secondly, lessons should be shared with other programme teams across the organisation via the Programme Resource Centre, which acts as a hub for learning in Oxfam GB.
And thirdly, they can contribute to learning at country and regional levels by feeding into Country and Regional Learning Reviews – two more processes in the MEL system that are designed to support learning at these levels. Monitoring Reviews provide the regular, systematic learning and engagement with partners that give Oxfam GB a strong foundation for learning at the next levels of the organization.

2: Linking Monitoring Reviews to programme plans

2.1 Articulating programme logic

Each programme should be based on a clear theory of change (i.e. how you expect change to happen within a given context). This theory should be aligned with the country's national change strategy. The expected contribution of a programme's activities towards this change can be represented in a simple programme logic model such as the one set out in Figure 1. Developing a clear programme logic model together with partners and other key stakeholders can help to build a joint vision of how you expect change to happen and the role each party will play in bringing about this change. It can also help to make explicit the assumptions you are making about the relationship between programme activities and intended change. Checking the validity of these assumptions is a critical step in the design of a programme. Without this information it is very difficult to monitor progress towards the intended change and to assess the programme's contribution towards it.

Figure 1



2.2 Developing indicators

Programme logic models can help you to identify the evidence required to show whether or not your programme has been successful and the indicators you can use to measure this. Two types of indicators are commonly used for monitoring: **outcome and impact** indicators and **process or activity** indicators. Process indicators are used to measure the progress of activities against your work plan while outcome and impact indicators are used to measure progress towards the changes you are hoping to achieve.

Good indicators are essential for a good monitoring system as they drive subsequent data collection, analysis and reporting. Information gathered against them should be both qualitative and quantitative to inform decisions about the programme. The number of indicators should be kept to a minimum to ensure that the system for collecting data focuses on the most important information and is manageable for staff and partners.

The following matrix can be used to test the feasibility and usability of each indicator:

Indicator	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Who will collect the data?	When will they collect the data?	Who will use the data?
1.					
2.					
3.					
Example: No. people who have completed the literacy training (Process indicator)	Course records, Trainers	Review of course records. Cross check by speaking with trainers	Oxfam GB partner	Jan 2009	Oxfam GB partner, Oxfam GB and local NGOs

2.3 Producing a monitoring plan

Monitoring should be a collaborative process between Oxfam staff, partners and communities. It can help to build a shared understanding of why and what we monitor, motivate those involved and ensure that participants provide timely and relevant information Therefore, agreement about what indicators will be monitored and how data will be collected against these indicators should be reached and form part of the contract between Oxfam and the partner. Some partners will need some support and skills development to enable them to take part in monitoring activities.

Monitoring plans should be thorough, but practical. This is helped by keeping the number of indicators against which information is collected to a minimum; by planning field visits to fit with monitoring activities; by involving partners and local communities in the information collection process (e.g. by keeping record cards or diaries) and by making the most of secondary data sources. Monitoring plans should also include processes for monitoring unexpected as well as expected changes. Further guidance on what to monitor can be found in Section 3.2.

2.4 Collecting baseline information

Once the programme logic model has been developed and indicators identified, a baseline study should be undertaken. This is the first formal set of measurements against outcome or impact indicators. A baseline study describes the situation at the beginning of or immediately prior to the development intervention, against which you can track changes in the lives of poor people. This enables programme teams to compare the situation before and after the intervention, to note changes and to consider what effects the programme has had on the situation.

2.5 Timing and focus of Monitoring Reviews

Outcome or impact level change takes time to effect, so it’s important to think carefully about when you collect information against these indicators. You may wish to focus on assessing progress against activities or outputs at the beginning of a programme and monitor progress towards the expected outcomes and impact at a later stage. The focus of your Monitoring Reviews will naturally reflect the focus of your data collection activities. You may decide to focus different Monitoring Reviews on different aspects of your programme – for example reflecting on monitoring information relating to livelihoods activities in one meeting, gender in another and community participation in another. This must be planned to fit with the timing of your data collection activities.

3: Collecting reliable monitoring information

Programme decisions should be based on a sound knowledge of what is and isn't working towards the intended change. This means that reliable monitoring information about the programme must be collected during field visits and external meetings prior to Monitoring Reviews and used to inform programme discussions and decisions.

3.1 Preparing for a monitoring visit

In preparing for a monitoring visit, key partner and project documents, such as the partner contract, work plan and their latest report should be reviewed as well as action points agreed in the last Monitoring Review. Your monitoring plan should be used to decide on the focus of your visit and subsequent Monitoring Review. When planning a monitoring visit:

- Be clear what your objectives are for the monitoring visit, and prioritise them
- Agree with your partner(s) what each visit will address
- Start with the project documentation: what should have happened by now and what should the results be?
- Formulate good questions and decide who to ask in order to get the information you want. It is particularly important to identify groups of people who have an interest in the programme who may be harder to access, such as women and marginalised groups, and to consider how their voices can be heard.
- Plan visits to project sites with your partner(s)
- Set up meetings with partner staff and / or communities in advance
- Validate information found in the documents with the real situation by talking with people living in poverty

3.2 Deciding what to monitor

Each monitoring visit should have its own specific objectives that include some or all of the following areas of enquiry:

1. **The changing context affecting programme implementation**
   Are there any changes in the programme environment that are influencing the programme's progress – either positively or negatively?

2. **Progress of the project against the work plan**
   Are all the scheduled activities taking place as planned? What delays, if any, have occurred and for what reasons? Are targeted numbers of beneficiaries being reached? Are target groups being reached? What is the forecast completion date compared with the work plan?

3. **Progress towards the intended changes**
   Your monitoring plan should provide guidance on when to collect information against particular indicators that track relevant changes in the lives of poor people. However, it should be possible to get a general sense of how well the programme is moving towards intended changes during each visit by asking questions such as:
   - What is the evidence of change so far?
   - Has there been any negative as well as positive change?
   - How have gender relations changed?
   - What do other NGOs, donors, government representatives and poor people think of the programme's progress?

4. **Partner management of the programme**
   Is the partner keeping good records of financial transactions, field visits, meeting minutes etc.? Is the partner following agreed administrative procedures? Have there been any significant changes within the partner organisation that could have an impact on the programme?

5. **Budget and resource issues**

Are there any significant budget variations? Are additional resources or reallocation of resources required? What is the final forecast of costs compared with the budget? Have programme funds been spent according to plan?

6. **Critical points and concerns arising from previous Monitoring Reviews or visits**
   Have action points agreed at the last Monitoring Review been implemented? What difference has this made to the programme?

7. **The relationship with partners**
   What do partners think of us? How is Oxfam GB performing against its partnership principles? How can the relationship be improved?

8. **Support needs**
   What problems is the partner facing in the implementation of the programme? What are the causes of these problems and how can they be solved?

3.3 Collecting monitoring information

There are a number of **methods** that can be used to collect monitoring information. These include key informant interviews, focus groups, household surveys and observations. Some methods provide simple quantitative data that can be easily aggregated and analysed, while others provide more in-depth qualitative information that can help to answer questions such as 'why' and 'how'? A mix of methods gives a more comprehensive picture of the situation and allows for crosschecking (or triangulation) of data.

You should always aim to **disaggregate** data that comes from men and women as they usually have different experiences of poverty, inequality and suffering and therefore of programme interventions. If data from men and women are not analysed separately, these differences are lost.

You should also consider how many people you want to talk to in order to build up an accurate picture of the situation. In general, the larger the **sample** and range of sources of information, the more accurate the information. However, this needs to be balanced against the time and resources available, as collecting data is very resource intensive. Sampling becomes particularly important when you want to demonstrate differences in peoples' lives as a result of your programme using statistical analysis.

3.4 Recording and presenting monitoring information

During your monitoring visits, actively listen to community members, observe behaviours and carefully record all that you see and hear, without bias. This information should then be presented during the following Monitoring Review meeting in an accessible way – for example, using visual aids - to enable all participants to reflect upon, analyse and learn from the same information. The raw monitoring information should be written up and stored for future use such as an external evaluation at the end of the programme.

4: Running a Monitoring Review

Once monitoring information has been collected, Monitoring Reviews should be held to reflect upon what this information is telling you about your programme and the environment in which it operates, and to decide what it means for your future work   At least two Monitoring Reviews should be undertaken each year for each programme (PIP).

4.1 Participation in Monitoring Reviews

Monitoring Reviews are primarily for programme teams and partners to have frank, open discussions about the progress of their work towards intended outcomes and to make decisions about how programmes can be improved. You may wish to invite others, such as community members, local government representatives, donors, managers or other programme team members to participate in these discussions. This can help to promote cross programme learning, increase accountability and create wider interest in the work, but it also has the potential to change how people behave in the group **-** reducing the quality and openness of discussions. If this is likely, it is advisable to invite just the core programme team to the Monitoring Review, and find other ways to engage wider stakeholders. The voices of people living in poverty can be brought to the meeting directly, by involving them in the meeting itself, or indirectly through carefully recorded notes of interviews, focus groups, surveys and so on taken during monitoring visits.

4.2 Content of Monitoring Reviews

Each Monitoring Review should have clear objectives that are agreed and communicated to all participants prior to the meeting and should cover the following issues and questions:

1 Opening the Review

Agreeing the purpose of the Review with all participants

2 Conducting the Review

2.1 What should we have achieved (in the programme) by now?
2.2 What information have we gathered, how and from whom?

2.3 What's working well, and why?
2.4 What problems are there, and how can they be solved?
2.5 What have we learnt about:

- The context where we are running our project,
- The programme area we are working on (e.g., livelihoods, health)
- The monitoring process itself?

3 Action after the review

3.1 What are we going to do about it?
3.2 Who will take action, and when?
3.3 What will we feed into other reports and discussions?

Wherever possible, participants should refer to the monitoring information during programme discussions to help ensure that these discussions and subsequent decisions are grounded in reality. This information should be checked and clarified to ensure that it is reliable, valid and has been interpreted correctly. Challenges to inaccurate or misleading information should be part of the discussions. All decisions taken during the Monitoring Review should be clarified and agreed by all participants and recorded along with clear, achievable action points together with the names of those responsible for taking action.

4.3 Preparing for Monitoring Reviews

Consideration of the following issues will help you to plan your Monitoring Review:

- **Participation**: Who will participate in the meeting (see section 4.1). Is the location of the Monitoring Review accessible to all participants? Is the meeting room an environment in which people can open up, share information and speak honestly about what they think? Is it free from distractions? Are there any barriers to full participation (e.g. language, cultural divides, gender barriers etc.)? If so, how can they be overcome?
- **Agenda:** How will you structure the conversations to make the most of the time? How will you ensure that all questions are covered? When will it start and end? Is there enough time to help people participate and discuss in a deeper, more reflective way?
- **Facilitation:** Who will facilitate the meeting? Are they sufficiently impartial and respected amongst the group participants? How will they encourage open discussions about things that aren't going well as well as those that are? How will decisions and actions be recorded?
- **Budget:** Who is paying for the Monitoring Review meeting? Are there sufficient funds in the budget? Will partners and other participants be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses?

4.4 How Monitoring Reviews contribute to more effective partnerships

Oxfam GB's Strategic Evaluation on Partnership highlighted the value that programme staff and partners place on joint review and reflection as a means of strengthening their relationships. Monitoring Reviews offer time and space for this reflection to take place, providing opportunities for programme staff and partners to:

- Develop a joint vision of what change we want to achieve and the role that each partner plays in bringing this about
- Review how the relationship is developing and what can be done to improve ways of working
- Meet face to face to review the programme's performance and to discuss how it can be improved
- Be mutually accountable: giving each party the opportunity to account for their actions and decisions
- Increase understanding of each others' perspectives
- Recognise problems and work together to solve them

5: Following up on Monitoring Reviews

5.1 Completing the cycle – putting learning and accountability into practice

As the programme progresses, it is essential that actions agreed during Monitoring Reviews are followed up and implemented. Learning from Monitoring Reviews must also be fed into programme design or direction. Ensuring that our programme remains responsive and relevant to the programme environment helps us to be accountable for what we do.

Key to ensuring accountability through monitoring activities is action and feedback:

- A summary of the Monitoring Review discussions and action points must be shared with key programme stakeholders, including the communities involved in providing monitoring information. It is important that they know what we have done with the information they gave us.
- The action points must be recorded, attached to the relevant PIP in OPAL and taken forward as agreed.
- At the next Monitoring Review, a recap of what was agreed in the previous meeting and what has been done since, should form part of the discussion.
- Other Oxfam teams that could have an interest in the Monitoring Review discussions should be contacted. For example the Regional Information and Communications Officer may be interested in stories of success or achievement and the Programme Resource Centre would be interested to hear if you have examples of good practice or programme lessons that could be shared with other programme colleagues.

6: Glossary of terms[1]

Term	Definition
Activities	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilised to produce specific outputs
Baseline	An analysis describing the situation prior to a development intervention, against which progress can be assessed or comparisons made
Contribution	An identified association between observed changes and a specific intervention which can be independently measured, and reasonably argued as being due to the intervention
Impact	Positive or negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended
Indicator	A quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement to reflect the changes connected to an intervention or to help assess the performance of a development actor
Inputs	The financial, human and material resources used for the development intervention
Monitoring	A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds
Outcomes	The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention’s outputs
Outputs	The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes
Triangulation	The use of three or more theories, sources or types of information, or types analysis to verify and substantiate an assessment

[1] All definitions except for ‘contribution’ taken from the OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management