

# The managing for impact approach

## M&E for learning and participation

Author: Jim Woodhill, Wageningen International Programme for Capacity Development and Institutional Change, Wageningen, the Netherlands< jim.woodhill@wur.nl>, Author: Mine Pabari, Regional consultant, Strengthening Managing for Impact Programme (SMIP), Kenya< mpabari@swiftkenya.com>

**There are increasing calls for new M&E approaches that encourage learning and participation. The authors explain how the managing for impact approach places M&E at the centre of learning and management processes.**

Unfortunately, top-down approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), focusing on the needs of donors and based on quantitative indicators, remain deeply entrenched in development circles. To shift this mindset, and to institutionalise learning-oriented practices, major investments in capacity development are needed. M&E that focuses on learning and participation requires management support, the engagement of all involved in implementation and, most important, a more flexible attitude among donors.



One initiative to develop a new approach to M&E is the Strengthening Managing for Impact Programme (SMIP). This is a partnership between the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Wageningen International's Programme for Capacity Development and Institutional Change, and training institutions in East and Southern Africa. The partners are working with regional M&E services to support 'new paradigm' approaches to M&E, and to develop expertise that can be drawn upon by other organisations and projects.

## Managing for impact

At the heart of the 'managing for impact' approach are people. This is in contrast with conventional approaches, where M&E often involves systematically following a series of steps for accountability purposes. The idea is that all those involved in a development initiative – communities, implementers, managers and donors – must be part of a learning alliance that seeks to achieve the greatest possible positive impact. Common sense perhaps, but the reality is that much development work has involved the unquestioning implementation of activities with little reflection on what those activities add up to in terms of outcomes and impact.

As an example of how managing for impact works in practice, the programme is working with the

Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) in Swaziland. The project had been struggling to develop the required log frame in a way that made sense to all participants. By facilitating dialogue and critical reflection, we were able to assist those involved to review the intended improvements, cause-effect relationships and underlying assumptions. Consequently, they revised the project's objectives in a way that reflected their own views of what the project intended to achieve, and how. This led to a much deeper understanding of how to involve everyone in tracking progress.

## Four tasks

The approach acknowledges that managing a development intervention involves four interlinked tasks:

- Guiding the strategy ? assessing whether an initiative is heading towards its goals (impacts) and, if not, quickly adjusting the strategy or even the objectives.
- Ensuring effective operations ? managing financial, physical and human resources to ensure that the outputs are achieved.
- Creating a learning environment ? establishing relationships with all involved in order to build trust, stimulate innovation, and foster commitment.
- Establishing information gathering and management mechanisms ? ensuring that systems are in place to provide the information needed, and encourage learning.



The success of this approach depends on the 'people processes' that ensure that the necessary information is gathered, sound decisions are taken, and individuals give their best. M&E can be seen as the key information gathering, analysis and sharing function that informs each of these tasks. However, information is only useful if it is shared and discussed, enabling reflection and learning, rather than used for control and compliance.

Learning events that can contribute to the process include partner meetings, informal discussions, participatory planning workshops and impact assessments, as well as performance appraisals and rewards for good performance.

To ensure that learning drives the process, it must be recognised that change is the result of coordination, integration and the commitment of all actors. Consequently, the challenge of managing for impact goes beyond ensuring the delivery of outputs ? it also includes influencing relationships and the actions of others. Efforts must also be made to distinguish between problems caused by poor implementation and those arising from incorrect assumptions about the intervention strategy.

'Managing for impact' views M&E from an holistic perspective, and places it at the centre of the learning and management processes that are necessary for any group or organisation to adapt to change and succeed in their ambitions.

# Links

Wageningen International resource portals:

[Multi-stakeholder processes](#)

[Participatory planning monitoring and evaluation](#)

[Wageningen International Programme for Capacity Development and Institutional Change](#)

[International Fund for Agricultural Development \(IFAD\)](#)

# Further reading

IFAD (2002)

[Managing for Impact in Rural Development: A Guide for Project M&E.](#)

R. Margoluis and N. Salafsky (1998) Measures of Success: Designing, Managing and Monitoring Conservation and Development Projects, Island Press.

J. Woodhill (2006) M&E as learning: Rethinking the dominant paradigm, in J. de Graaff et al. (eds) Monitoring and Evaluation of Soil Conservation and Watershed Development Projects, Science Publishers.