XXI. The monitoring system[3]

21.1. Definition

Monitoring comprises a range of project management tasks at different levels throughout project implementation. It allows to continue the strategic thinking undertaken at the planning stage and guarantees that the project "stays on track": this is **strategic monitoring**. At the same time it allows regular assessment of work progress (action/activities) and use of resources (human, material, financial), and explains any discrepancies: this is **operational monitoring**.

Monitoring therefore has a key role to play in the project cycle: to some extent it forms the **link** between implementation and planning.

Without a sound monitoring system, the best planned strategy is in danger of not being implemented in optimum conditions, for the strategy worked out during the planning exercise is actually a series of hypotheses (IF we do this, THEN we will obtain such a result). The validity of such hypotheses can be verified by evaluating the results of the action planned; to do this, we need sufficient data to analyse. This calls for an effective system of permanent monitoring of project implementation, bringing together a range of appropriate measures (processes, rules, tools and functions).

In the absence of a monitoring system we are in no position to ascertain whether we are on the right track or whether our intervention should be reoriented.

Planning is merely a starting point and an attitude of mind. Implementation and monitoring are all important.

21.2. Aim

The aim of the monitoring system is to guarantee the success of the project (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance).

3 For information, the term "monitoring" is used in English, "suivi" in French, "seguimiento" in Spanish and "acompanhamento" in Portuguese.

21.3. Functions / usefulness of monitoring

In addition to checking progress in relation to specific /tangible project components included in planning and programming, the monitoring system has other important functions, namely:

- Improving institutional capacity to **understand** the realities in which it is involved, to **act** and **organise itself** effectively and efficiently.
- Enhancing project **transparency** and **accountability**[4] with regard to all stakeholders (including beneficiaries). This is mainly through (oral and written) **reporting** on project performance and project choices to the various partners: staff in the field, local authorities, Headquarters, working groups, donors, etc.
- Facilitating **evaluation** so that teams have a clear idea of "where they're at" in order to defend their position through solid argument.
- At a later stage and as a result of information gathered, enabling **capitalisation** of lessons drawn from practice, and disseminating them to create institutional capital (see chapter on capitalising experience).
- **Perfecting indicators** identified at the planning stage where appropriate in order to evaluate project performance (at the level of objective and expected results).
- **Broadening stakeholders' field of awareness** so that they become increasingly lucid about the realities in which they are intervening and the effects of their action.

A good monitoring system must:

- As far as possible involve beneficiaries through participatory methods
- Be a learning process permitting action to evolve and Terre des hommes to develop as a "learning organisation"
- Be a tool for management rather than control
- Be included in a process of information, communication and consensus-building
- Be of use in the field and Headquarters equally, without tying up an excessive amount of resources.

4 The term "accountability", for which the English word is often used in French, encompasses the concepts of transparency, responsibility and compliance with norms. Extract from the SDC magazine ("Un seul monde" No. 3, September 2000): "The dictionary translates the English word "accountability" into French by responsibility, particularly in the financial sense. In international cooperation, the term is used to designate the person or body responsible – accountable – for a project, intervention or programme. It may be a government, ministry, the World Bank or the SDC, or also a manager or person in charge of a project. Accountability is basically the opposite of arbitrary. It involves concepts of frankness and assumption of responsibilities, a commitment to assuming, rendering accounts and providing explanations. All participants in a given project can thus count on observance of the criteria of transparency, reproducibility and effectiveness." (free translation from the French)

21.4. The process

As we have seen, monitoring is very closely linked to planning, implementation and evaluation. The essential **preliminary conditions** for introducing a high performance monitoring process are therefore:

- A clearly defined final aim, objective and results for the project
- The existence of relevant and realistic tools such as indicators, in order to be able to measure the state of progress of the above elements
- Availability of basic or baseline data[5] on which the project is constructed and which makes it possible to have a point of comparison.

The basic reference documents for a project (strategic plan and annual operational plan) should contain this information, and set out the main lines for the monitoring system it is intended to put in place (type of data to be gathered, when, by whom, etc).

The monitoring process can be broken down into three main stages:

Gathering information (collecting, measuring, observing) :

- Quantitative and qualitative data at the beginning of the project (baseline data) to have a point of comparison for project performance
- Quantitative and qualitative data during the project, to measure project performance
- Data relating to the indicators fixed during planning
- Criteria to orient the choice of data collection methods : reliability, validity and efficiency.

Data analysis, making it possible to:

- explain any discrepancies between expected and obtained results,
- anticipate whether the results obtained will allow the project objective to be achieved,
- assess project implementation,
- analyse stakeholder interaction.

Readjustment, making it possible, where appropriate[6], to:

- continuously optimise actions to better achieve the set results and objective (aiming at effectiveness)
- making the best use of (human/financial) resources available (aiming at efficiency)
- making selective modifications to strategy (strategic plan) so that our efforts are continuously focused on the results and objective the project is aiming for.

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5 The English term "baseline data" is also often used in French.

6 This stage is obviously not necessary where the two preceding stages have shown that everything is on track.

21.5. Fields of application

We can monitor, observe and measure a wide variety of different trends within the project or in the project's environment. Consequently, there are different levels of monitoring. In order not to become overwhelmed by an avalanche of unprocessed data we should focus on the essential. Reference documents to guide us in preparing the monitoring system to be established are the project strategic plan and the annual operational plan.

Following the logic of these two documents, we can distinguish between **five fields of application for monitoring**:

Document 1: Project strategic plan

1. situation
2. intervention logic
3. model of action
4. project appreciation criteria

Document 2: Annual operational plan

5. actions/activities and project organisation.

1. Monitoring the situation

At the origin of any project there is always an unsatisfactory situation on which the project is intended to have a positive impact. It is therefore crucial to follow changes in the situation and evaluate the role the project has in this respect.

It is also necessary to ascertain what the factors are in the project's environment that may have a positive or negative impact on project implementation and the effect the project can have on these factors.

This means opening our eyes to the reality around us, while at the same time remaining critical of our a priori assumptions and how we see reality.

By following the sequence of planning stages and using essentially the same tools[7] we can direct our attention towards:

7 Under each heading a series of key questions has been developed which we should take as a guide.

Project context (immediate environment)

Changes having taken place in the context in relation to our initial analysis:

- in fields such as national/regional policies in our sector of intervention
- at policy[8], legal, social and economic levels, etc.

How have these changes affected the project and what is envisaged in the future?

The problematic

- Is our problem analysis carried out during the planning stage still relevant?
- Have there been significant (quantitative and/or qualitative) changes calling for further analysis?

For example: developments in the scope of the problem (prevalence of malnutrition, number of children in street situations/CSS, etc), any changes in the nature of the problem (type of malnutrition, increased violence affecting CSS, etc), changes in the target group affected (age, origin of children, etc) or other meaningful and significant developments.

Stakeholders

- Is the stakeholders analysis we made during planning still relevant or does it need to be looked at in greater depth as a result of what we have learnt?
- Have further players emerged or existing ones disappeared? Which?
- What positive and negative experiences/influences have there been in collaborating with stakeholders?
- Have there been any changes in the strategies of our main partners? What about our partnerships?

Resources and potentialities

- Is the analysis we made during planning still relevant or have other resources/potentialities been identified during the year?
- What are the most promising resources/initiatives?
- How has the project been able to put to good use the resources and potentialities identified? What have been the positive and negative experiences?

Limitations, obstacles and risks

- Are new obstacles threatening the future of the project, or have obstacles identified during planning proved to be groundless in the meantime?
- How have these risks/obstacles affected the project and what strategy has the project applied to circumvent them?

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8 In the case of a country programme including several projects it is not necessary for each project to follow up the national "macro" policy of the context. This is usually done by the delegation office for the country concerned, and each project can thus take from it the major lines or aspects having a direct influence on their projects.

The results of this exercise will be of great importance for monitoring external assumptions (see below).

2. Monitoring the project's intervention logic

The field of application of this monitoring process focuses on our intervention logic, i.e. the foundations of our planning: the **FORA**. This obviously calls for a clearly defined strategy including objectives and results as well as indicators for measuring them.

With regard to monitoring the objective and strategy (results), we should concentrate on three fundamental aspects: **effectiveness, efficiency and relevance**.

By following the sequence of planning stages and using essentially the same tools (key questions), we can look at:

Future vision of the project

Where there has been no significant change in the situation/immediate environment of the project, it is not necessary to dwell on the vision, which therefore remains the same as at the time of planning. However, where there has been significant change, it becomes necessary to redo scenarios and redefine the future vision of the project.

Final aim

Same as for the vision. It is always useful to ask how much our intervention has contributed (or is on the way to contributing) to the final aim of the project.

Objective

During planning we have all realised how difficult it is to set a sound objective. Realising this in itself justifies the importance to be given to monitoring the objective as the central component in project strategy. It involves:

- Monitoring and analysing **effectiveness**: To what extent (how far) has the objective planned been achieved or is likely to be achieved? With what quality?
- Monitoring and analysing **efficiency**: Have (human, financial, time) resources been or will likely be used optimally?
- Monitoring and analysing **relevance**: Does the objective achieved or being achieved still meet the expectations/needs of the target group?

How do we proceed?

- Application of the indicator (or indicators) to the objective to establish to what extent the objective has or will be achieved, which means checking on whether what was intended has been or will be achieved or whether (where it seems likely that this will be the case) there are discrepancies. If there is or is likely to be any discrepancy, it is necessary to ascertain the reasons for reorienting intervention appropriately. The indicator makes it possible to take note of any discrepancy but does not explain it, an analysis is thus necessary.

- Where it has not been possible to identify an indicator during planning, it may be possible that a performance indicator has been identified since; it should then be used and included in the logframe (with the relevant means of verification). Where we can still not identify a reliable and relevant indicator, the best possible appreciation should be made by other means to assess how far the objective has been attained. For this, reference will be made to the monitoring tools described below, for example by triangulation of different methods
- To establish whether or not and "to what extent" the objective has been or will be achieved does not tell us whether it is appropriate, i.e. an objective enabling the target group to progress towards resolving its problem more perceptively and thus to advance towards the "improved" solution being sought (= the solution closest to our ideal scenario). However, it should be clear that **any change of the objective in the course of a project (or phase of a project) should be an exception rather than the rule**. If it nonetheless proves necessary the project can be said to be in crisis, and it then becomes necessary to negotiate with Headquarters and donors for project readjustment.

Results (strategic axes)

We proceed in the same way as for monitoring the objective, but at the subordinate result level.

Global strategy

For this we look at the coherence of the overall intervention strategy and its capacity to contribute towards achieving the final results and objective.

- What interactions/synergies are there between the different axes?
- Should the importance of the axes be weighted differently?
- Should we add/remove/readjust any axis according to how much each one contributes to achieving the objective?

External assumptions (critical conditions)

- Are external assumptions identified during planning still valid?
- What changes have occurred? Are there any new external assumptions? Should any be removed?
- What has their real influence been on the project? Has the project been able to influence one or more of them, or is there room for improvement?

For this we could base ourselves on and possibly use the conclusions of situation monitoring.

3. Model of action

Here we focus on our method of intervention and the approach the project wishes to adopt with regard to beneficiaries, as well as technical and methodological tools used. The model of action is the "recurrent approach strategy" in the project's intervention logic.

A result or objective can be achieved in different ways, by using different approaches which make up as many models of action. We can for example adopt a preventive or a curative approach, choose between formal and informal education. For priority fields (CSS, CR, MCH, NUT [9]), the model of action will be inspired directly from the sectoral strategies.

Hence there are two possibilities:

- **The existence at Terre des hommes of a sectoral strategy/thematic resource person:** one single project does not contain all working options or models of action of a sectoral strategy but selects from among them at the outset (e.g.: a Children in Street Situations project may establish a drop-in centre rather than to do street contact/outreach). Monitoring the model of action in such case consists of looking at how relevant the original choice was. At the same time, and also of concern to resource persons here, is the monitoring of tools used in the project: their usefulness, any problems using them, results, proposed improvements, etc.
- **Absence of a Terre des hommes' sectoral strategy and/or thematic resource person (e.g. psychosocial [10], psycho-trauma, prevention of child abandonment/support to single mothers, etc):** in as far as there is no sectoral strategy specific to these themes nor a priori any relevant technical tools, the project has to rely on its own capacities and experience (with or without the assistance of external expertise) to identify the model of action behind the intervention logic. It is therefore of interest to monitor project performance from the standpoint of this model of action: How does the project relate to beneficiaries? What has functioned well and what has functioned less well? Are there any proposals for improvement? This stage is closely linked with the capitalisation process and should eventually make it possible for a sectoral strategy to emerge.

4. Project appreciation criteria

Because they represent Terre des hommes' values and principles for action [11] and make it possible to take a different, more cross-cutting view, criteria such as

9 Children in Street Situations (CSS), Child Rights (CRs), Maternal and Child Health (MCH), Nutrition (NUT)

10 While the creation of a post of resource person in this field is planned for 2002, there is for the time being no specific psychosocial sectoral strategy.

11 Strategic Plan for the Terre des hommes Foundation 2000-2004, Ch. 6.

sustainability, consistency, participation, expected impact, gender and networking must also be subject to monitoring. They are also often required by donors to be included in the reports we submit to them.

In addition to effectiveness, efficiency and relevance, these are key criteria in assessing the project overall, for example in an evaluation (quality criteria of a development project[12]).

Depending on the project and its location, some appreciation criteria will already have been taken into account during monitoring of the situation, intervention logic and/or model of action; it will therefore not be necessary to do it all again. However, the fact of approaching them again from a different angle provides additional assurance that none of these transversal views have been overlooked and makes it possible to assess the project globally in its strategic and institutional dimensions. In addition, it simplifies preparation of the monitoring reports which must include them.

Sustainability

This must be the key criterion for any development project and must therefore be monitored. A project must be clear at all times about the chances of sustainability of the benefits it is offering to the target group. For that there are a number of key questions to be asked:

- Is there a strategy for withdrawal[13] from the project or has some thought been given to it? Within what time frame? How and with whom? What are the benefits/services which will last beyond the end of the project?
- What assessment can be made of the long-term viability of project benefits?

Consistency

A closer look has to be taken at how consistent the intervention logic of the project is with national policies, the Foundation's strategic plan, sectoral strategies, etc. Such a stage is obviously only justified where there has been some readjustment in the intervention logic (and, in particular, strategy) or where there have been significant changes in context (for example a new national policy).

Participation

- What have been the promising participatory experiences which have motivated the target group, partners and project team?
- How and to what extent (information, consultation, joint decision-making, etc) has the participation of beneficiaries and other stakeholders been obtained?

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12 Criteria can sometimes be different or differently weighted (e.g. sustainability criterion) for an emergency project.

13 The terms "phasing out strategy" or "exit strategy" are often used.

Project impact

While not expressly contained in our project strategic plan[14], we must seek and analyse the impact our action has had on beneficiaries and on the project's environment.

- What effects /changes have we provoked outside the planned objective and which lie outside the direct sphere of influence of the project?
- Can we already identify positive and/or negative impact on the environment/society in which the project intervenes?

We should also take a look at stakeholders "indirectly affected" by the project, where this has not already been done in the stakeholder monitoring.

Gender

Another look should be taken at the analysis conducted during the planning stage to see whether it has evolved or whether it should be refined in light of what we have learnt in the course of monitoring. It should be determined whether it is necessary to adopt a new gender approach in order to guarantee involvement of both women and men (girls and boys) and take this into account in the project's effort.

- Have gender approach/measures proved sufficient? Should any changes be made, and if so which?
- Can we identify any impact by the project on relations between women and men in the immediate environment?

Networking approach

- What has been the role of/what has the project actively done in terms of networking?
- Has the project been a driving force in the networking of partners active in the intervention sector?
- What are the essential complementary services provided by networking?
- Is it necessary to change the approach? If so, why and how?

Project cycle management (tools and methodological processes)

- Describe any possible improvements in project management methods (planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, etc).
- Are planning/monitoring/evaluation/reporting tools effective and efficient? If not, what proposals are there to improve them?
- Have evaluation/auditing exercises been carried out?

Local capacity and institutional building

- To what extent has the project contributed towards local capacity building (transfer of know-how, awareness raising, exposure to other experience, etc)?

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14 One of the main characteristics of impact is precisely that they cannot generally be planned.

- Where appropriate: how is the project's localisation proceeding? What might be improved? Should the localisation strategy be changed?

5. Actions / activities and project organisation

Having reviewed strategic monitoring by going over the four main chapters of our project strategic plan (situation – intervention logic – model of action – project appreciation criteria), we should turn to operational monitoring, i.e. monitoring of the second key document for our project: the **annual operational plan**.

It is essential for the project team to conduct effective and sustained operational monitoring; such monitoring makes it possible to obtain information necessary to take management decisions, essential for **optimising** actions/activities on an ongoing basis.

Programming actions

In the programming stage, actions are broken down into activities. It is up to those in charge of the project to check progress regularly, oversee the timetable for implementation and report back to the rest of the team. In the event of problems not extending beyond the level of action (in other words, not requiring a change in project strategy), any necessary readjustment should be made directly by those in charge in the field. Where problems significantly affect the rest of the project however, team decisions should be taken. This monitoring makes it possible to **optimise actions**, an essential element in the quality and success of the intervention.

Structures and procedures

- Has the project structure undergone any modification?
- Analysis of the functioning of the proposed flowchart (organogram): does it match reality in the field or does it require adjustment?

Human resources of the project

The way members of a team use resources, distribute work and organise internal collaboration (communication, conflict management, etc) has considerable influence on the success of the project. This is why it is important to discuss matters in the framework of regular monitoring and thus develop team management skills. The following should be taken into account:

- Responsibilities – qualifications, job descriptions: satisfaction – dissatisfaction among personnel, evaluation of each individual's skills and their optimum use, etc.
- Quantification – man/days, salary scale: evaluation of the adequacy between set objectives/results and available human resources.
- Flowchart: analysis of how the proposed flowchart is functioning and whether it corresponds with reality on the spot or needs adjustment.
- Training of project personnel.

Financial resources

The accounting department draws up terms of reference for key aspects of financial and accounting monitoring. For the first years, once budgeting by strategic axis has been introduced, it is important to be able to analyse real expenditure so as to be in a position to ensure more realistic budgeting.

21.6. Who does what, when and how?

As we have seen, the monitoring process can be broken down into three main stages: data gathering, data analysis, and readjustment.

The first is the responsibility of the field. The content (typology of data) should be defined for each project depending on the field of intervention and nature of the project, context, available resources and intervention strategy (indicators and means of verification) planned; there can be no standardised system at this level.

For the two other stages, Headquarters' involvement is greater in defining the content, which is more "standardised" (according to Terre des hommes' norms). On the one hand because the stages of analysis must lead to harmonised products (mainly in the form of reports) required by Headquarters to be kept informed (monitoring) and pass on information (mainly to donors), and on the other hand because the readjustment stage calls for decisions which have financial and strategic implications.

Preliminary conditions for a sound monitoring system

We should bear in mind that when we embark on project implementation, we already need to be clear about the type of data we intend to gather throughout project implementation (planning the monitoring system).

Then, for a monitoring system to function well, each of the persons involved should know what his or her responsibility is, what he or she is to do on a daily basis, and above all be aware of what its purpose is. Concerning this last point, two aspects can contribute considerably to the success of monitoring:

- all those involved have been consulted from the outset and feel that they have been associated with monitoring arrangements made
- they are regularly informed of monitoring results (feedback), particularly following analyses.

Where there is no consultation or feedback, it is very likely that some persons will fail to take monitoring efforts seriously, or might even "invent" data if they do not see the use of them simply to please their superiors.

The two reference documents for the project (the project strategic plan and the annual operational plan) should motivate and be the basis for the monitoring system we intend to establish.

What should be done and when?
§ 21.5 offers a full theoretical picture of the different fields of application for monitoring and what it implies. In practice, however, we cannot constantly make a thorough systematic review of everything, as the team would spend all its time doing this. According to "time" and "decision-making" criteria, we distinguish different processes and moments.

1. Ongoing: data collection

This is a "common trunk" required for both strategic and operational monitoring. During the planning/programming stage, the project team has defined a series of indicators and means of verification making it possible to measure whether we will achieve the planned results or not. The head of project then determines who collects what data, when, and in what form data should be recorded (monitoring sheets, logbooks, registers, cards, etc). **Data collection is often an ongoing task throughout project implementation. It is the responsibility of the field team.**

2. Analysis and readjustment

2.1 Regularly: operational monitoring

Each member of the project collects data from the reality he/she encounters directly. This information should be shared with the rest of the team at **monthly review** meetings under the head of project. Having pooled information, the team will be able to assess the state of progress of the project in relation to the operational plan (action – activities planned, schedule, use of resources, etc.), making **optimisation of actions/activities** possible.

Unless it involves major modifications in the use of financial resources (budget), **any decision-making about readjustment (or optimisation) of activities or action is for the field to do on an ongoing basis**, with Headquarters merely being informed of decisions. A concise record of these monthly meetings will provide a written record of decisions taken (of use in the event of staff changes) and can serve as a basis for intermediate reports (see next chapter on reporting).

2.2 Periodically: strategic monitoring

Depending on the timetable, depth of analysis, and decision-making process stemming from the results of the analysis, different moments can be differentiated during a project phase.

Semi-annual meeting on project progress

Once every six months, the project team as a whole meets with the delegate to take a fresh look at the logframe prepared at the planning stage and measure progress achieved towards the various results. Measurement is by means of indicators and means of verification included in the logframe, obtained from data gathered by the project. The following should be done at this point:

- Verifying whether the expected results have or are likely to be achieved. Where there are discrepancies, this should be explained.
- Seeing whether any other more effective and relevant indicators (which, for example, may not have been identified at the planning stage) might be used for the continuation of the project.

The result of this exercise can be used as a basis for the "logframe monitoring" part of the semi-annual report (see format in the next chapter).

Annual meeting on project progress

This is practically the same exercise as for the half-year meeting, except that a more in-depth analysis of the situation and strategy of the project over the previous year should be included. **The result of this exercise can be used as a basis for the annual report** (see format in the next chapter).

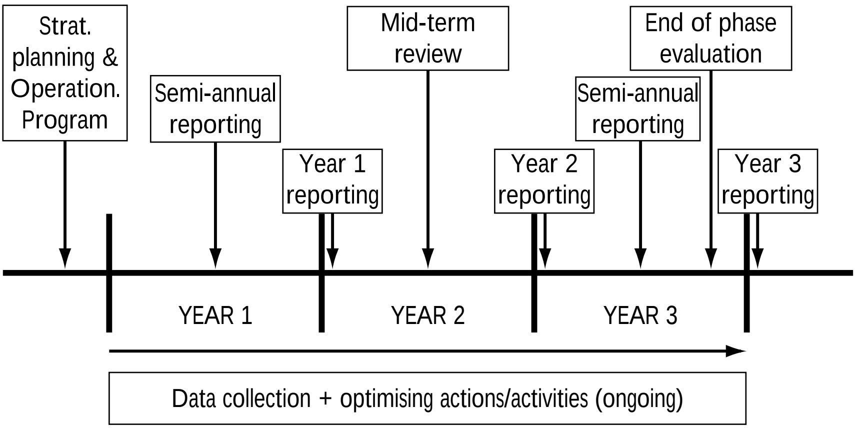
Mid-term review

Under the responsibility of the delegate and on a participatory basis, the whole project team revisits the various stages of strategic planning and draws up an assessment of the situation, the strategy, the model of action, and project appreciation criteria. This is a self-evaluation calling for an investment of several days. For this, the team should use as a starting point the results of previous reports, systematic data collection and dialogue with beneficiaries and partners. This is the real **momentum in terms of strategic monitoring of the project**, making it possible to propose adaptations to the project strategic plan drawn up during planning. It is therefore important to reserve sufficient time for this crucially important exercise.

This momentum should take place at mid-term (for example, at the end of 18 months for a three-year project phase). Where the length of the phase is shorter or in the event of a crisis, it can naturally be arranged for any more suitable moment.

Proposals for modifying strategy coming out of this exercise will then be discussed with Headquarters. Better still: the person in charge of the geographical area should be on the spot when the review takes place. In operational terms (operational plan), these modifications can be taken into account in the course of budget preparations for the following year.

In summary this gives the following at the process level[15]:



Crisis meeting

Should there be unexpected events susceptible to significantly change the situation or affect the direction the project is taking, a crisis meeting should be immediately convened after gathering the necessary information so as to suggest to Headquarters the measures to be adopted.

21.7. Techniques (tools) employed in monitoring

Each stage of the process (data collection, analysis, readjustment) has its methodological tool. We refer to some of them, but the list is far from exhaustive. Many of these tools are in no way specific to monitoring but are shared by all the sciences and serve above all to make precise diagnoses using as few resources as possible.

15 In the case of a project stage starting at the beginning of the calendar year for a three-year duration occurring without major obstacles.

Qualitative and quantitative methods

For a long time, data collection and information analysis was limited to quantitatively measurable factors (for example, statistics, prevalence rates, schooling rates, etc). However, in Terre des hommes' fields of intervention, it is necessary to obtain qualitative as well as quantitative information. Therefore a balance must be found when choosing appropriate methodology and corresponding tools.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are not mutually exclusive to one another; each has its own advantages and limitations. Qualitative methods are generally less structured, but more difficult to set down and process. Quantitative methods seem more "scientific" and credible (tangible data, objectively verifiable) but offer less flexibility.

The quantitative approach seeks to know **how much**, while the qualitative approach seeks to ascertain **what, why and how**.

In the quantitative approach, we will use statistical methods, analyse figures, and our surveys will be more structured, with questionnaires of a more closed nature. We will proceed by using anthropometric measurements. Generally speaking, sampling is broader than for qualitative research.

In the qualitative approach, greater importance will be given to observation, open interviews and focal group discussions. Qualitative surveys measuring changes in behaviour and attitude are generally relatively complex processes which require careful handling.

Qualitative results can be reliably obtained by **triangulation** of different tools, such as observation, surveys/interviews, statistical data/study of documents (records, register, etc). Triangulation makes it possible to study the same social reality from different angles, either by combining different research techniques or by associating different persons with different skills. *"Methodological triangulation makes it possible to exploit the strong points of different methods, allowing for cross-checking of results and counterbalancing the limitations of each method. (…) It is equally possible to cross approaches and combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Good triangulation is the ideal; but often time and/or research budget restrictions reduce its possibilities. Nonetheless by using only two methods there is a greater chance of producing valid and reliable data than by research based on a single method."*[16]

We should be guided by three criteria in choosing data collection methods:

- **Reliability:** this means that if someone else collects the same data, or if the same persons repeat the data collection at a different time they will obtain the

16 Extract from the workshop report "Social qualitative research methods on tropical diseases", held in Darda and N'Djamena from 6 to 24 October 1997, jointly organised by the TDR of the World Bank/UNDP/WHO and the Swiss Tropical Institute (Basel and N'Djamena) (free translation from the French)

same results. The use of systematic testing by questionnaire and interview guides can enhance the reliability of data collection.

- **Validity**: this means ascertaining whether the data collected offer a true picture of the reality. It may be that the same questionnaire or survey used by different persons leads to the same results but that this result does not match reality or does not make it possible to measure the change we wish to observe. Triangulation is aimed at offering greater validity in data collection and in the interpretation of information gathered
- **Efficiency**: this means the cost in financial and human terms in relation to the size of the measurement to be made. Systematic use of existing data, where they are reliable, is more advantageous than collecting data by one's own means

Observation – looking around

This should be the ideal tool for any project agent. This tool allows for flexibility and adaptability, aspects which are often lacking in more "technical" tools. It is also the tool with the greatest capacity to generate unique information that other tools cannot produce because of their lack of flexibility.

For this it is necessary to be able to spot and grasp the meaning of changes on the basis of **significant facts** actually occurring. Not just our reality but also that of beneficiaries. What strikes us most and why? Observing the world around us, preferably with the beneficiaries themselves, and interpreting changes and their consequences thus emerges as an important activity in monitoring. Knowing how to observe is an aptitude and a skill mainly developed through constant practice.

It is not enough to observe; transcription and sharing of the results of observation are also necessary. The limitations of this tool often lie in the capacity, role and status of the observer.

Chronological data recording

The recording of data chronologically constitutes a necessary minimum. Those in charge of projects and services should produce graphs and tables with information regularly reflecting the state of progress of their service or project. **Care should be taken to record only necessary data and not waste energy in compiling unprocessable data of no use for analysis.** The "indicators" and "means of verification" columns of the logframe should serve as a guide when completing registers, cards, etc. It should be checked that all data necessary to make indicators easy to read are included, and that all data collection dates match indicator dates. Any unnecessary data should be excluded from registers, cards, etc., as they encumber the monitoring process without adding anything of value.

Regular surveys

Data can be obtained through regular surveys (nutritional surveys, etc). Surveys should match pre-established terms of reference coinciding with project needs. For each field of intervention there exist specific survey methodologies. Headquarters resource persons should determine the methodologies to be used and the terms of reference to be observed, as these are essential to obtain comparable results and allow for progress in sectoral strategies.

The term “survey” often tends to bring quantitative methods to mind. However, qualitative survey methods also exist, such as the KAP (Knowledge-Attitude-Practice) or KPC (Knowledge-Practices-Coverage) methods. These methods can be very useful in better understanding the environment in which we are intervening but are complex and more difficult to handle than quantitative surveys. Therefore, before embarking on a qualitative survey of such type, it is necessary to make sure that the skills necessary to conduct it are forthcoming and what is wished to be obtained has been clearly identified.

Structured interview

This is complementary to other, more participatory approaches. A questionnaire is usually included in a structured or formal interview. In the context of Terre des hommes' intervention, it is preferable to present the questionnaire personally at an early stage of monitoring. In the course of the following stages and where the persons concerned are accustomed to it and have the skill (literacy, etc) to do this, it may be possible for the questionnaire to be self-managed (the persons involved complete the questionnaire themselves). While this can be time-saving in collecting data, it is often offset by a loss of time during analysis.

Semi-structured interview (semi-directive interview)

Another form of interview: instead of a questionnaire, the interviewer uses a check list of subjects/questions to be addressed. This type of interview allows the parties to express themselves more freely but is more difficult to analyse.

Sampling

Any form of data collection poses sampling problems. The literature on opinion polling and survey methods offers some information on the subject. It should be borne in mind that sampling must match the target group for the objective or the indicator to be measured. To have a measure of impact of our intervention, we may choose children of a given age group and district having benefited from a specific service offered by the project. To conduct a nutritional diagnoses we may choose a random sample from among all children of a given age group in potential zones of intervention of the project.

Other tools

The number of tools is almost unlimited.There is abundant literature on the subject. A simple Internet search is likely to provide a multitude of documents very rapidly. Which one should be chosen? When? For what purpose?

The answer to these questions is to be found for each project depending on its activity, the basic training of those in charge, and the organisational culture in which it is taking place. Most Terre des hommes' sectors of activities (priority fields of intervention) may require very specific tools (for example, the "Child-Street System"). Resource persons at Headquarters must play a decisive role in evaluating existing tools and where appropriate developing specific sectoral tools for their dissemination.

The following are an indication of existing "generalist" tools:

- SWOT (Strength – Weakness – Opportunities – Threats), or SEPO in French (Succès –Echecs – Potentialités – Obstacles).
- Participatory Rural Appraisal / PRA, Rapid Rural Appraisal/RRA, Accelerated Participatory Research Method /APRM (MARP in French), etc.

Other tools are to be found on Internet sites and in specialised works (see also the bibliography at the end of this Handbook).

Summary:

Monitoring is a set of project management tasks conducted throughout project's implementation making it possible to:

- ***extend strategic thinking undertaken during planning and ensure that we "keep on track": this is strategic monitoring***
- ***regularly measure the progress of work and use of (human, material and financial) resources, optimise action and explain any discrepancies: this is operational monitoring***

The aim of the monitoring system is to guarantee the success of the project (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance). In addition, a sound monitoring system enhances project transparency and accountability with regard to all stakeholders (including beneficiaries), and facilitates reporting, evaluation and capitalisation of experience.

The reference documents which should guide us in setting out the monitoring system are the project strategic plan and annual operational plan. The monitoring system itself must be effective and efficient (reasonable cost compared to the project).

The monitoring process can be broken down into three main stages: (1) data collection, (2) data analysis, (3) readjustment.

Five fields of application for monitoring can be identified: (1) situation (2) intervention logic (3) model of action, (4) project appreciation criteria, (5) actions/activities and project organisation.

Operational monitoring is an on-going process and makes it possible to optimise actions/activities. Decisions about readjustment are taken in the field.

Strategic monitoring is conducted on a periodic basis (semi-annual and annual reporting, mid-term review). Decisions about readjustment are taken at Headquarters, and, where appropriate, with donors.

Many methodological tools/techniques are not specific to monitoring and can also be used for diagnosis of a situation and for planning. It is necessary to find a balance in qualitative and quantitative data collection.