

Monitoring and Evaluation Primer

Part of the Responsible Investment in Property and Land (RIPL) Guidebook Series

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Introduction

This primer on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) offers a brief explanation of what M&E is, why it is important and what common best practices are associated with it, all in the context of supporting the implementation of a socially responsible land-based investment. It also includes specific guidance on how to develop and execute an effective M&E plan for the implementation of an investment under Phase 4 of the RIPL Guidebook investment timeline, corresponding suggested M&E indicators, and links to additional resources.

This primer should be used as a starting point for the development of a customized M&E plan for each investment project through a collaborative and consensual process that reflects the desired outcomes of all affected stakeholders.

Overview

M&E generally describes a category of information-gathering efforts designed to assess projects or interventions against a set of predetermined standards. It requires intentional observation of compliance with agreed upon standards and processes, and systematic measurement of anticipated outcomes. Data gathering to support these functions may involve reviewing records and reports as well as interactions with various stakeholders, including marginalized women and men land holders and users, to assess the experiences of people affected by a project or intervention. The results of M&E assessments can provide insight into aspects of projects and processes that are working well to advance desired outcomes while also highlighting areas that need improvement.

An effective M&E framework is based on a set of agreed upon standards and activities that are thought necessary to advance desired outcomes and goals. In the case of an agricultural investment project, those standards and outcomes should derive from international standards and best practices as well as state laws and policies and be informed by a variety of stakeholders including government, community members and civil society.

Why include Monitoring and Evaluation

M&E is integral and beneficial to any project. One primary purpose is to help ensure the project remains on track to achieve desired outcomes and identify potential challenges to reaching those goals for immediate correction. To achieve this, M&E is valuable for collecting and maintaining accessibility to information; keeping all stakeholders on track and ensuring accountability; mitigating risks; taking corrective action towards commitments or compliance; enhancing shared knowledge and best practices; and making ongoing, informed and efficient decisions and adjustments to improve project design, implementation and outcomes

M&E plans are particularly important when socially responsible objectives may be in conflict with others types of interests such as efficiency and scale. They are also useful when implementation of a project happens outside the direct and regular purview of those who designed the socially responsible policies.

Additionally, there are specific risks and benefits that affect each stakeholder group involved in land-based investments that can be mitigated by an effective M&E plan, as outlined below.

Risks and Benefits to Businesses

- Businesses often make commitments to their shareholders and/or member associations (e.g. RSPO), and to communities and the government in the target country to adhere to certain standards with respect to human rights, labor standards and environmental impacts. M&E helps to track compliance and devise corrective measures as soon as gaps in the implementation of those commitments are identified.
- Businesses risk criticism and damage to their reputation in the case that they are accused of irresponsible investment practices. M&E helps to identify such issues early enough to take corrective action.¹ More specifically, initial and ongoing assessments of community relationships and experiences, including adherence to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), can provide important information for an investment's risk profile.
- Failure to monitor and evaluate social dynamics, including gender dynamics, in a target community often leads to limited success or in some cases a complete collapse of an investment.² For example, monitoring can help plan for conflict mitigation by identifying and addressing disputes before they escalate into conflict. Moreover, ongoing evaluation of dispute resolution processes, or grievance mechanisms, can help in determining their effectiveness and robustness.
- The flow of information between all relevant parties is crucial for the success of an investment. M&E helps to collect and disseminate relevant information to community members, government and other stakeholders.
- Monitoring and evaluation is an important process for documenting challenges, failures, successes and effective strategies that can provide crucial insights for subsequent investment projects and industry best practices.

Risks and Benefits to Government

- Governments often make international commitments on respect for human rights, labor standards and environmental impacts. M&E helps to track compliance and devise corrective measures as soon as gaps in the implementation of those commitments are identified.
- M&E can improve investments' compliance with national law, community by-laws and international standards. This signals to investors that the country is a secure, stable environment for investment, which in turn can attract further investment.
- Careful M&E of an investment can help confirm that communities support and are equitably benefitting from an investment at the household/community- or micro-level, which can contribute to the country's macro-economic growth.
- Effective M&E can provide systematic data on social demographics, land use, agricultural trends and community experiences for local and national government entities.
- M&E is an important process for documenting challenges, failures, successes and effective strategies that can provide crucial insights for subsequent investment projects and governance best practices.

Risks and Benefits to Communities

- Communities sometimes have by-laws that define land use and ownership rights and inform their engagement with a prospective investor and any benefit sharing arrangements. M&E helps to track compliance and to devise corrective measures as soon as gaps in the implementation of those commitments are identified.
- Furthermore, governments should have in place laws and policies protecting their constituents' rights, and business enterprises should commit to policies and processes that promote gender equitable, socially responsible investment practices. M&E of those commitments, particularly with the support of a CSO, can help to keep government and business stakeholders accountable.
- Community members will want to maximize benefits received from an investment. Initial and ongoing impact assessments, often through the support of a CSO, can help evaluate potential benefits and weigh them against any adverse impacts of the investment. The assessments can also highlight who is and is not benefitting, why, and what needs to be adjusted to further improve equitable benefit sharing.
- A community often needs information from both the business and government. A CSO's support in monitoring provides an opportunity to exchange and receive information and to also highlight information gaps that need to be addressed.
- M&E is an important process for documenting challenges, failures, successes and effective strategies that can provide crucial insights around how a community might engage with a future investment proposal and share its experiences with other CSOs and communities.

Developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan and Indicators

With the common goal of implementing gender equitable, socially responsible investments, the stakeholders of each project should determine particular indicators that would suggest that these ideals have been achieved. Additionally, stakeholders should develop a list of standard practices that are expected to achieve these outcomes. For each investment, defining success and specific outcomes for the community, government and business is what should drive the M&E plan.

Key Principles for Effective M&E Practices

In approaching any investment, stakeholders should be aware of best practices that guide investment-related M&E in order to facilitate ongoing assessment, learning and subsequent corrective actions and improvements to project design and implementation, as necessary. The following are nine guiding principles for effective M&E practices.

1. Commitment to Monitoring and Evaluation

As a starting point, stakeholders should be well aware of the standards and processes that shape responsible land-based investment best practices. Following from those guidelines, there should be a commitment to developing and implementing a comprehensive M&E plan that includes relevant monitoring and evaluation processes at all levels: national, policy, community, project and activity.³ Moreover, the M&E plan must include clear enforcement and accountability processes. These include mechanisms for corrective action and adjustments to project design, and sufficient resources for their effective implementation⁴⁵. Finally, the M&E plan should be established and communicated before any investment activities begin to ensure clarity and commitment among all involved stakeholders.

2. Collaborative and Consensual Processes for Developing M&E Plan

The M&E plan may be primarily driven by one party, often the business, but should still be inclusive of relevant stakeholders and sources in the development of indicators, benchmarks, assessment processes, and mechanisms for grievance, redress and learning.⁶ This includes community by-laws, national laws and policies, business enterprise policies and procedures, and international guidelines and best practices. Moreover, participation in the specific design of the M&E plan should be gender sensitive, where both women and men are involved in the design, implementation and assessment of M&E plans.⁷ It should also be culturally appropriate, based on engagement and dialogue in the local context, with consideration to the local culture. Finally, M&E will be most effective when there is shared responsibility, commitment and accountability amongst the different stakeholder groups as established from the outset of pre-planning for an investment.

3. Realistic and Sustainable M&E Plan

While the ideal conditions establish high standards for ongoing, rigorous M&E, accounting for realistic timelines and resources for conducting M&E is equally as important. If unrealistic expectations are established, it can become easy to discount failures to meet M&E commitments. It is important to have an informed assessment of what skills and financial and time management resources it will take, including gender expertise, to implement an effective and sustainable M&E plan. It is then important to identify cost effective approaches and have an implementation plan that provides for sufficient resources to support ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning throughout the life of the project.⁸

4. Transparent Independent Evaluation

Generally, M&E conducted by neutral third parties is the highest standard to aim for. Third party evaluations, where feasible, can help to maintain independence and minimize conflicts of interest.⁹ In some circumstances, neutral third parties are the only stakeholders that can effectively provide M&E assessments. Given resource constraints, however, this may not always be realistic. Furthermore, there may be some conditions that merit internal assessments. Regardless, transparency throughout the process of developing and conducting M&E and disseminating observations and recommendations is paramount. Transparency provides an important element of legitimacy to M&E efforts. Furthermore, the continuous and transparent exchange of information can help to track progress and jointly identify gaps for remedial action.

5. Accessibility

In addition to transparency, M&E plans and ongoing M&E processes and reports should be made publicly available through all relevant mediums, including electronic or printed copies as necessary.¹⁰ M&E plans and assessments should be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders, in a timely and transparent manner and in local languages, as necessary.¹¹ The content and process of dissemination should also be gender sensitive,¹² for example by taking into account lower literacy rates for women in many countries. Ideally, there would also be processes for affected stakeholders to review and provide feedback on M&E reports and recommendations.

6. Accountability

M&E plans and processes are limited in their value to strengthen investment outcomes if they are not accompanied by accountability mechanisms for corrective action; processes for aggrieved parties to request action or redress that are accessible for both women and men (see the Grievance Mechanism Primer); and opportunities to make adjustments to project design and implementation. In some cases, it may be appropriate to implement mechanisms for the sanctioning of non-compliance.¹³ All of these measures flow from a well-conceived and well-resourced M&E plan. In general, a lack of accountability will likely undermine the M&E process and goodwill amongst stakeholders.

7. Source of Continuous Learning & Improvement

M&E plans and processes should ultimately provide opportunities for learning and improvement. There should therefore be a commitment to and resources for the integration of recommendations following from M&E assessments to make subsequent adjustments and improvements to standards, project design, and project implementation to strengthen the investment process and outcomes for all stakeholders. This is important for the specific investment, but sharing lessons learned with other stakeholders can also strengthen land-based investment practices more broadly throughout the agricultural investment sector.

8. Gender Sensitive Approach

As noted above, participation in the specific design of the M&E plan should be gender sensitive, where both women and men are involved in the design, implementation and assessment of M&E plans.¹⁴ It is also important to ensure there is sufficient gender expertise among M&E personnel, including dedicating resources and/or providing capacity development where necessary. Accountability mechanisms should be relevant for both women and men. And the dissemination of all M&E processes, reports and recommendations should be gender sensitive, taking into account how women and men might have different communication norms and process information and feedback differently.¹⁵ Failure to consider the experiences and perspectives of both women and men will weaken any M&E plan and its implementation. It can also further entrench gender inequalities and lead to less desirable outcomes for the stakeholders involved in an investment project.

9. Human Rights-Based Approach

Finally, all M&E plans and processes should be guided by internationally recognized human rights standards and principles, including equality, non-discrimination, participation, inclusion, gender awareness, and respect for rule of law and due process¹⁶.

Indicators

Below are suggested indicators to be tracked and evaluated. These follow from best practices outlined in the guidebooks that lead to equitable, responsible investments and would include, for example, ensuring that women community members are consulted.

Company Policies and Procedures

The business has in place policies and procedures that adhere to relevant national laws and international standards for socially responsible investments, and demand adherence from all suppliers. Confirm that policies and procedures:

- Clearly affirm and comply with the business enterprise's commitment to specific international standards (such as the VGGT or AU Guiding Principles) and the application of those standards to each land investment.
- Comport with national law, but also meet international best practices, which often require efforts that go beyond what is called for by national law.
- Require the business enterprise's suppliers (e.g., vendors, contract farmers, etc.) to adhere to similar standards.
- Implement and enforce the policies and procedures throughout business operations.
- Outline or refer to specific mechanisms to achieve best practices, such as impact assessments and community consultation and engagement.
- Establish internal standards for incorporating land tenure risks into decision making.
- Have endorsement at the highest level of the enterprise, are known by all working within the enterprise, include clear lines of authority for implementation and enforcement, and are publicly available.

Community Systems and Safeguards

The community has strong systems and safeguards in place that are rooted in good practices, indicators of which include:

- The establishment of a Land Investment Committee empowered to lead efforts in preparing the community for possible changes to the investment and represents the community in discussions with prospective investors.
- The incorporation of community rules or by-laws that specifically govern land investments, particularly how decisions will be made about company accessing and using land in the community.

The delivery of effective awareness-raising and training activities to ensure community members are informed about their rights and understand benefits and risks associated with investments.

Ongoing Due Diligence

To avoid infringing on legitimate tenure rights and land uses:

- Business identifies actual or potential issues and risks that any changes to the project may pose to communities and individuals (both men and women).
- Business refrains from cooperating with any illegitimate use of eminent domain/expropriation by a host government to acquire land.

- Business discloses changes to the investment project publicly, including any contracts or permits for a concession, that enable the company to buy, lease, hold or develop new land

Engagement and Consultation

The business's engagement and consultation process with the local community is in accordance with FPIC, including:

- Development of an engagement and consultation plan with the community that:
 - Consists of a series of engagements and multiple meetings,
 - Involves two-way communication between business and community, and
 - Includes active participation from groups that are frequently under-represented in decision making such as women, youth and ethnic minorities.
- No use of coercion, force, intimidation or other types of pressure placed by any business representatives on communities and individual women and men to change the use of, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of their land and natural resources.
- Provision of all material information to communities and individual women and men necessary to make an informed decision prior to seeking and obtaining consent.
- Explicit consent from communities and individual women and men to any proposed project that involves transferring or changing the use of their land or natural resources before the business or government implements the project.
- Effective consent from communities and individual women and men to any material changes to the project prior to the implementation of those changes.

Impact Assessment

The business conducts an environmental and social impact assessment to identify and gauge actual or potential impacts from the project on the environment and community, including impacts affecting land users, land rights and livelihoods.

- Business presents assessment findings and proposed mitigation measures to the community.
- Business presents assessment findings to government officials and external experts.
- Business incorporates assessments findings into the investment project.

Grievance Mechanism

The business establishes a well-functioning grievance mechanism that should have the following characteristics:

- Internal policies and procedures that provide managers and employees with explicit steps on how to process and resolve complaints;
- Internal procedures to ensure cooperation between the chief grievance manager and the employees or contractors with close knowledge of the subject of the grievance;
- Guidance on the types of performance data to be recorded and reviewed for monitoring and evaluation purposes;
- Periodic internal review to ensure the mechanism's functionality;
- Set timeframes for responding to complaints to ensure consistency within the company and predictability for complainants.
- Providing fair remediation in cases where the company caused land rights violations.

Resources

- FAO, *Guide on Legislating for the Right to Food* (2008), available at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/righttofood/documents/RTF_publications/EN/2voll_toolbox_Monitoring_guide.pdf
- FIAN *How to Monitor States' Actions* (2007), available at http://www.fian.org/fileadmin/media/publications_2015/2007.11_Screen_state_action_against_hunger_How_to_use_the_Voluntary_Guidelines.....pdf
- IFPRI *Filling the Learning Gap in Program Implementation Using Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Lessons from Farmer Field Schools in Zanzibar* (2013), available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2245673>
- International Association for Impact Assessment *Guidance for Assessing and Managing the Social Impacts of Projects* (2015), available at http://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/SIA_Guidance_Document_IAIA.pdf
- OHCHR *Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Trade and Investment Agreements* (2011), available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-59-Add5_en.pdf
- UNDP, *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation for Development Results* (2009), available at <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/documents/english/pme-handbook.pdf>
- World Bank, *Monitoring and Evaluation: Some Tools, Methods, and Approaches* (2004), available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23975>
- World Bank, *Using Mixed Methods in Monitoring and Evaluation: Experiences From International Development* (2010), available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/3732>
- World Bank Working Group, *The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations* (2009), available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2699>

¹ See Leslie Hannay, David Bledsoe & Mina Manuchehri, “Realizing Socially-Responsible Investments in Land from a Gender Perspective: Unpacking ‘Zero Tolerance’ to Identify Barriers and Practical Steps to Achieve Positive Long-term Change,” Paper prepared for presentation at the World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, The World Bank - Washington DC, March 14-18, 2016, available at <https://www.landesia.org/wp-content/uploads/Tools-to-Enable-Socially-Responsible-Land-Related-Investment.pdf>.

² The Munden Project, *The Financial Risks of Insecure Land Tenure: An Investment View* (2012), available at http://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/doc_5715.pdf; The Munden Project, *Communities as Counterparties: Preliminary Review of Concessions and Conflict in Emerging and Frontier Market Concessions* (2014), available at http://www.rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/Communities-as-Counterparties-FINAL_Oct-21.pdf.

³ DE SHUTTER, O., “Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Trade and Investment Agreements”, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, presented at the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council, available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-59-Add5_en.pdf.

⁴ Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* ¶ 3.B.10 (2012) [hereinafter VGGT], available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.* at ¶ 12.14.

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- ⁶ UNESCO, *A Guide for Monitoring and Evaluating Community-Based Projects* (2009), available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001862/186231e.pdf>; African Union (AU), *Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Based Investments in Africa* 25-26 (2014) [hereinafter “AU Guiding Principles”], available at https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/guiding_principles_eng_rev_era_size.pdf.
- ⁷ VGGT, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 13.6 and 15.9
- ⁸ *Id.* at ¶ 26.2.
- ⁹ E. Brú, *Design, Monitoring and Evaluation of Technical Cooperation Programmes and Projects: A Training Manual*, (International Labour Office 1995).
- ¹⁰ VGGT, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 26.5.
- ¹¹ *Id.*
- ¹² *Id.* at ¶ 15.9
- ¹³ AU Guiding Principles, *supra* note 6, at 25-26.
- ¹⁴ VGGT, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 13.6, 15.9.
- ¹⁵ *Id.* at ¶ 15.9
- ¹⁶ FAO, *Methods To Monitor The Human Right To Adequate Food* (2008), available at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/righttofood/documents/RTF_publications/EN/2voll_toolbox_Monitoring_guide.pdf.