

CHAPTER 5

SETTING UP AN M&E STRATEGY IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Choosing the right indicators is critical, but M&E is much more than simply selecting a set of pertinent indicators; it also involves the identification and strengthening of data systems to ensure that indicators can be captured in a timely and reliable fashion. A number of different institutions are likely to be involved, and institutional capacity has to be reviewed and, if necessary, strengthened. Above all, the internal demand for M&E has to be nurtured and promoted, and the concepts of management by results need to be progressively introduced at all levels. This is not a trivial exercise and is best undertaken by following a carefully sequenced action plan. The objective of the plan should be to improve the flow and use of indicators and other statistics for monitoring and evaluating ARD projects and programmes. Wherever possible, the action plan should be formulated within the framework of the PRS, or equivalent national development plan. The challenge is greatest in countries where conditions are less than ideal, that is, where demand is weak, evidence is not used to inform decision-making, and the stock and flow of information are irregular, unreliable and/or available with an unacceptable time lag. The first step is to undertake an assessment of current capacity. In some countries, the capacity may already be strong; in others, particularly the poorest or those that are in or just coming out of a conflict situation, the basic infrastructure may not be available at all. All countries stand to gain from this exercise, but the latter stand to gain the most. A key objective of the strategy is to help countries to map out a route that is most appropriate to their specific situation – and to monitor progress as they proceed along that path.

Countries should develop a national M&E capacity as an integral part of their overall ARD strategy. The first step is to undertake an assessment of current capacity. In some countries, the capacity may already be strong; in others, particularly the poorest or those that are in or just coming out of a conflict situation, there may be no basic infrastructure at all. All countries stand to gain from this exercise, but the latter stand to gain the most. A key objective of the strategy is to help countries to map out the route that is most appropriate to their specific situation – and to monitor progress as they proceed along that path.

Countries should define a strategy for developing national M&E capacity as an integral part of their overall ARD strategy.

To help carry out this exercise, the reader is specifically referred to the publications of Paris 21, in particular, *A guide to designing a national strategy for the development of statistics* (OCED/DCD, 2007).

The path to action consists of six steps:

1. Assessment and diagnosis
2. Review of indicators
3. Review of current data, sources and gaps
4. Development of action plans
5. Review of resource requirements
6. Monitoring the performance of the M&E action plan

STEP 1: ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSIS

The starting point is an assessment and diagnosis of the current situation. The assessment should recognize the M&E systems in operation and related initiatives, and build on them – not try to replace them. The purpose of the assessment should not be just to document the current state of M&E, but also to highlight and document what is and what is not working, and to assess the demand and interest for promoting a greater degree of results-oriented management. The cultivation of this demand must be a continuous and ongoing process, and is essential if the initiative is to move forward. If a strong advocate can be identified to take the lead in this work, chances of success will be significantly increased.

In order to facilitate the assessment process, a simple assessment survey is described in Annex 3. It includes a checklist of questions to be addressed. The checklist may be used in one of two ways. The short method is only suitable as a workshop exercise and is based on group discussions. It is appropriate if the primary objective is to raise awareness and stimulate interest in M&E capacity building in general. The full method is more suitable if the final objective is to prepare a proposal for an M&E capacity-building programme. Whichever the route used, the objective is to accumulate sufficient information to fill out a scorecard that will be used to rank the national M&E capacity on a scale of 1–100. The answers are obviously subjective; they can only be interpreted in general, not absolute terms. Countries scoring over 75 points would be considered to have strong overall capacity, and those with an overall score of less than 25 points would clearly have very limited capacity.

STEP 2: REVIEW OF INDICATORS

Step 2 is built around the analytical framework discussed in Chapter 2. Again, the starting point is to identify actual development actions, ongoing or planned, and to look at what indicators are currently being used. Then, for each of the development actions, an appropriate set of indicators is selected, using the methodology set out in Chapter 2 and the menu of indicators in Annex 1. This should be compared with the indicators currently being collected, and a

definitive list proposed. Each indicator should be accompanied by additional information regarding the source and periodicity required.

STEP 3: REVIEW OF CURRENT DATA, SOURCES AND GAPS

Step 3 then shifts the focus to the NSS, in particular the NSO, and the Ministry of Agriculture and other ARD Ministries who also contribute statistics to the system, and to compare what is available with what is needed – as identified in Step 2. This comparison aims to identify gaps in the data series and weaknesses in the data collection system that would need attention in order to meet these demands. The review does not just concern data; it must also consider the tools used to provide them. How, for instance, are production estimates obtained and with what frequency? Are there any alternative sources of information that can be used to check the official estimates? The institutions involved are also taken into consideration, including an assessment of their capacity to collect, process, and disseminate specified statistics information. The review should also ascertain whether there is any ongoing or planned programme of assistance to support the strengthening of the institution's capacity. Finally, it needs to include a review of the system itself, its management and the roles of the various stakeholders, thereby complementing and completing the work of Step 1.

STEP 4: DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLANS

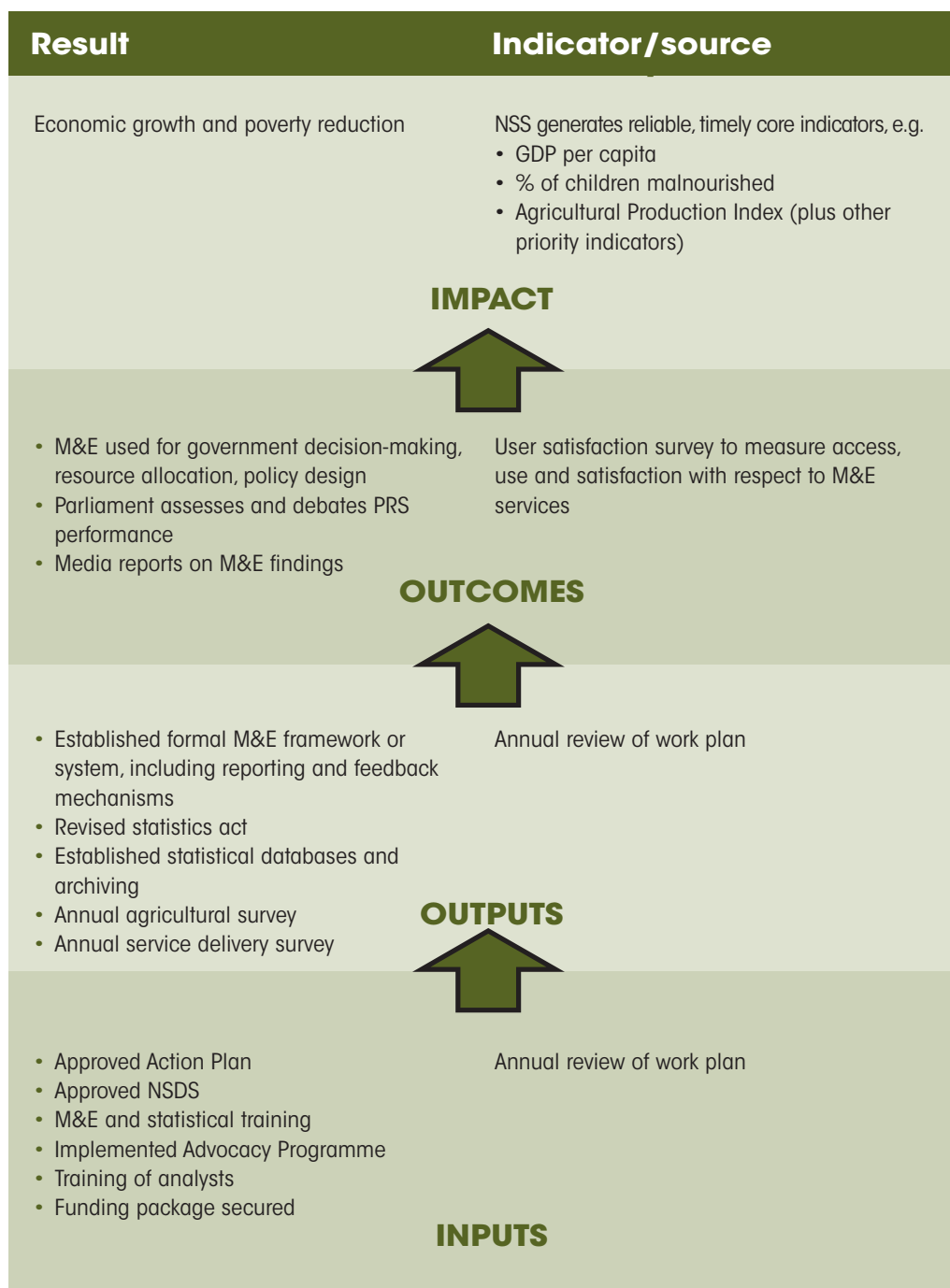
Earlier chapters discuss the use of the logframe for developing a project by starting with a vision of the future (goal) and then conceptualizing a path to reach it. Step 4 is where that process begins. It is clearly important that there is a common or shared vision for the M&E system. Clearly, this will depend largely on the vision for the ARD strategy itself. Box 22 provides a useful summary of what an NSDS might include. A number of questions have to be addressed. Is the M&E system envisaged as a public service to be used to hold the management of public services accountable or, rather, as a tool allowing the beneficiaries themselves to be informed about M&E findings so that they can compare their situation with, for instance, that of their neighbouring district? And what about impact evaluation capacity? What capacity should be permanently available within the system and what could be contracted out?

Having defined the vision, how is it to be achieved? Will it be by strengthening what already exists or by putting something new in place? Will this be strictly an ARD M&E network or a component of a larger national M&E system? What are the priorities in terms of actions – to get some results as quickly as possible or to invest in staff training and capacity building first and then start to work on data provision?

STEP 5: REVIEW OF RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

Step 5 addresses the issue of the resources required. As part of the diagnostic in Step 3, an assessment should already have been made of the current costs of

Box 23. A results chain for building an M&E system



M&E and its outside financing. These figures need to be updated and the future costs of the system estimated. The final issue to be examined is the financing and how much might realistically be forthcoming in the form of international assistance. The national budget to foreign investment ratio should be calculated and projected over a period of, say, five to ten years. What is the amount of public funds currently being invested in M&E? What is the level of international support needed?

STEP 6: MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE M&E ACTION PLAN

The final task is to define a system to monitor the performance of the M&E action plan itself. The system should identify what reports are to be submitted by whom and when, and should include indicators for each of the four levels – inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact – including details of how they are to be provided and with what regularity.

The end result should be to produce a development programme with a results chain that is very similar to the one shown in Box 23. The programme has been conceived using the same process described in Chapter 2, with which readers should now be familiar. The top of Box 12 shows that the intended long-term *impact* of a strengthened M&E capability is to contribute to the national development goals of economic growth and poverty reduction. The outcomes that will contribute to the achievement of these goals will be an increase in the range and number of users and in the overall level of satisfaction with the quality and relevance of the information database. The indicators will include standard early outcome indicators of access, use and satisfaction. At the start, the primary users or stakeholders may simply be those who have a financial or management interest in the project (donors, government). Later on, these should expand to include the beneficiaries, civil society at large, and their representatives in Parliament. Over time, one may also expect to see the media becoming more interested as well.

The expected changes in client behaviour depend on the ability of the M&E programme to generate useful outputs in terms of indicators, reports, studies and evaluations, workshops and training, etc. These changes must be assessed not just on the basis of the quantity produced, but also of the quality of the product. It is at this level where, in the first instance, capacity-building efforts are likely to be focused – particularly with respect to countries where conditions are less than ideal. Finally, at the bottom of the chain are the inputs that need to be made available in order to generate the outputs referred to above. Inputs include human resources, training workshops, equipment and financial resources, both national and international.

