

PART 1: FACT SHEET

The fact sheet is the first of four parts contained in this module. It provides an overview of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of nutrition interventions in emergencies. Detailed technical information is covered in Part 2. Words in italics are defined in the glossary.

The importance of M&E

In emergencies the overwhelming concern of all the people involved is to act swiftly, efficiently and effectively to save lives, stabilise a volatile situation and to mitigate against both unintended impacts and future shocks. In order to be able to do this, it is extremely important that M&E activities form an integral part of all interventions to improve quality, accountability and provide opportunities for learning. Participatory approaches to M&E are particularly valuable to ensure that the views and perceptions of the affected population are incorporated into the design of the response and accountability to the community is increased.

What is monitoring?

Monitoring is the systematic and continuous oversight of the implementation of an activity which seeks to establish the extent to which input deliveries, work schedules, other required actions and targeted outputs are proceeding according to plan, so that appropriate and timely action can be taken to improve the quality of work.

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the process to determine as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and impact of activities in light of specified objectives. It is a learning and action-oriented management tool and a process for improving current activities and future planning, programming and decision-making.

What areas need to be covered in evaluation?

The following are the minimum areas that must be included by the evaluation team in order to assess the nutrition intervention:

- **Effectiveness:** (achieving objectives – doing the thing right, including cost-effectiveness)
- **Efficiency:** (doing it right, with as few resources as possible; effort, time, money, people, material)
- **Relevance/Appropriateness** (doing the right thing in the right way in relation to local context, needs and priorities)
- **Impact** (doing the right thing, changing the situation more profoundly and in the longer-term)
- **Coverage** (the extent to which the interventions reach the intended target population – linked to effectiveness)

Other important areas of enquiry are:

- **Timeliness.** In emergencies there are different responses at different points in the emergency. These are generally expressed as: (immediate) response and rescue; recovery (short to medium term); rehabilitation (medium to long term). Interventions should be tailored to the phases.
- **Connectedness.** Activities of a short term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer term and interconnected problems into account.
- **Coherence.** All relevant policies (security, humanitarian, trade, developmental and military) are consistent and adequately consider humanitarian and human rights.

Inter-agency evaluations

There is a trend to try and combine evaluations of organisations with different mandates to obtain a fuller picture of the overall operating context and causal relationships between intervention areas.

Real time evaluations

These are carried out as soon as possible after the immediate first phase response and usually processed quickly within one month of interviews and data collection. They are intended to provide quick and practical feedback in 'real time' in the early stages of an emergency to strengthen the response.

Key messages

1. The monitoring of nutrition interventions in emergencies is an integral part of saving lives and maintaining nutrition status of the affected population.
2. Successful monitoring systems allow for improvements in interventions in 'real time'.
3. Evaluations are important tools for learning, assessing interventions, comparing the costs of the interventions and their impact. Essential evaluation parameters are: effectiveness; efficiency; relevance/appropriateness; impact and coverage
4. Successful evaluations have four main qualities: prior agreement on the purpose of the evaluations; the scope of work answers the questions (who, what, where, when and why); a capable team; and the results are used.
5. Involving communities in M&E places the affected population at the heart of the response, providing the opportunity for their views and perceptions to be incorporated into programme decisions and increases accountability towards them.
6. A common mistake of designing M&E systems is creating a framework which is overly complex. Always make an M&E system practical and doable.
7. Numerous guidelines exist for the M&E of nutrition interventions.
8. Existing challenges in the area of M&E of nutrition in emergencies include: lack of standardisation of methodologies and indicators; absence of an agency with a mandate to act on the findings; limited time for establishing baseline information and M&E systems in rapidly evolving environments; methodologies which are often not realistic to measure impact; and lack of information on cost effectiveness.
9. There is an opportunity cost of M&E. This has led to poorly developed monitoring systems and limited expenditure on evaluation resulting in a general lack of learning about interventions.

Monitoring and evaluation systems

An M&E system should be developed as a programme is conceived and evolve as the programme is implemented. The M&E plan sets out what information should be collected, by whom, when and how and how often. It should clarify what information should be collected regularly for monitoring and what should be looked at in an evaluation. It should clearly state how the information will be used. It is important to keep M&E systems simple and address only the fundamental questions that need answering.

A useful basis for the design of M&E of an intervention is the *logical framework* which provides a matrix through which the concepts of impact, outcome, outputs, inputs and indicators can be combined into one monitoring and evaluation tool. *Indicators* are the essential tool of M&E, providing a measure against which performance or progress of an intervention can be compared. Involving communities and representatives of the beneficiaries in the process of selecting indicators will help increase their relevance and the communities' understanding of the results. Indicators of process and outputs are usually simpler, easier and less costly to measure than outcome or impact indicators. Changes in outcome and impact indicators may be difficult to attribute to a specific intervention due to the multi-sectoral nature of responses to a humanitarian crisis and the complexity of the situation. Nevertheless agencies should endeavour, perhaps in collaboration with others work-

ing in the same areas in similar or related sectors, to assess outcomes and impacts in order to assure themselves and their stakeholders that the intended outcomes and impacts are being achieved

There are guidelines for the M&E of each of the main nutrition and nutrition related interventions in emergencies, including general food distribution, livelihoods interventions, management of severe and moderate acute malnutrition, infant and young child feeding, micronutrient interventions and for HIV/AIDS and nutrition.

Cross cutting themes

Humanitarian emergency situations often place certain vulnerable groups within a population to greater risks. With respect to this, Sphere 2011 identifies the following cross cutting themes: gender, children, older people, HIV and AIDS, persons with disabilities and psychosocial support that require special attention in the way programmes are designed across all sectors. For each these groups, increased vulnerability includes a greater risk of deterioration in their nutritional situation. Therefore, M&E of nutrition interventions also needs to consider these cross cutting themes to ensure specific needs are being adequately addressed. This may require addressing in the way data is collected and disaggregated, analysed and interpreted. Disaggregation of data by age, gender and/or diversity makes vulnerable groups more visible. If they are visible at the data

collection stage, then it is more likely their specific needs will be incorporated into programme planning and implementation.

Challenges for M&E in emergencies

There are a number of major challenges for M&E in emergencies:

- Lack of standardisation of methodologies and indicators
- Lack of time for establishing a baseline making it difficult to measure change (impact)
- M&E systems are often established in a rapidly changing environment (for example, changes in the people affected and population movement)
- Lack of an agency with a mandate to act upon findings from nutrition evaluations and to disseminate lessons learnt

- Lack of information on the cost effectiveness of some nutrition interventions.

The *opportunity cost* of M&E, i.e. if resources are spent on M&E, what will not be done, has frequently led to weak systems and a general lack of learning about interventions. However, well conducted M&E can ultimately improve the cost of programming through highlighting what is going well and areas needing adjustment.

In addition, there are few population level impact assessments carried out during nutritional emergencies. This is often because case control studies may not be feasible or ethical in many contexts. Furthermore, time constraints faced in emergencies may limit the opportunity to carry out research, whether scientifically controlled studies or observational studies.

