**Establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework for public engagement**

**Introduction to monitoring and evaluation**

In South Africa the National Treasury and the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation have respectively published the Framework for Managing Performance Information (2007) and the National Evaluation Policy Framework (2011). These frameworks aim to articulate the significance of measuring programme and project performance, standardise monitoring and evaluation nomenclature within government-led programmes, and structure performance information to better depict how government uses resources to deliver on its mandate. At the level of programme and project monitoring, the aim is to create a structured way to understand how activities are achieving their impact goals and providing value in terms of public investment for social change.

The first step of the M&E process is the co-development, among all stakeholders, of an overarching **Theory of Change**. Rogers (2014) defines a theory of change as:

*A ‘theory of change’ explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. It can be developed for any level of intervention – an event, a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy or an organization. A theory of change can be developed for an intervention where objectives and activities can be identified and tightly planned beforehand, or that changes and adapts in response to emerging issues and to decisions made by partners and other stakeholders.*

The theory of change (TOC) focuses on the desired outcomes of the intervention, with the aim of explicating the logic that provides causal links between each of the components, and how they contribute towards overall impact. A theory of change should show how changes are time bound, illustrating how short term outcomes, medium term outcomes and long term outcomes are related. The theory of change also shows how the outcomes of the intervention ultimately lead to the achievement of its overarching vision - the *impact* of the intervention.

The TOC provides a model of causality that underpins the analysis of indicator data, and provides the core structure for M&E studies at all scales, from the micro-project level to the national systems level. M&E indicators provide information about the outcomes expressed in the TOC. Analysis aims to interpret how the achievement (or not) of outcomes can be explained by these indicators, and interpret the extent to which the overall model of the intervention is functioning.

While the TOC structures M&E analysis by creating a framework for understanding cause and effect, the ‘**logical framework**’ or ‘logframe’, provides a framework for defining and collecting indicators that can provide an empirical foundation for such analysis. The logframe positions outcomes and outputs in a matrix framework, and provides additional detail about how indicators for each of these can be developed and used for M&E purposes. Thus while a theory of change explicates the causal logic of an intervention, the logframe provides a systematic guideline for defining, measuring, and using indicators that can provide insight into the achievement of outputs, outcomes, and impact. The logical framework is a tool for mapping the set of indicators that can be used for monitoring and evaluation. It provides operational guidelines for data collection, and also for the analysis of these data in terms of their contribution towards understanding overall progress towards achieving outcomes and impact.

*Outputs* indicators need to be quantitatively measurable in some way, making this set of indicators particularly relevant to the formation of integrated data systems. Different, but overlapping, sets of outputs indicators will be relevant at the systems level, programme level, and project level. An effective MEF requires the establishment of alignment across these levels: project and programme level indicators, when aggregated, must be compatible with system-level indicators, and must be drawn from the same underlying causal logic explicated in the TOC. If this alignment is achieved, it will be possible for aggregated indicators, drawn from projects and programmes, to be useful for a) M&E of individual programmes and projects, b) M&E of overall performance, and c) understanding changes in the systemic context.

*Outcomes* indicators move a step beyond the limitations of outputs indicators. Indicators of outcomes do not need to be quantitatively measurable. The assessment of outcomes therefore can combine quantitative and qualitative techniques. Analytically, it is important for M&E reports to show, drawing on the logframe, how each of the activities and outputs within their scope led (or not) to these outcomes.

*Impact indicators* are designed to measure the extent to which the overall impact of an intervention has been reached. *Impact* assessment is the highest level of analysis within the MEF. On the basis of indicators describing inputs, outputs, and outcomes, and drawing on the expertise of M&E specialists, these data will be used to take the analytical step from immediate outcomes to long-term broad social impacts that achieve the overarching vision of the communication strategy.

**M&E framework structure**

A M&E framework generally consists of the following components:

* Theory of change
* Logical framework
* Data architecture
* Programme-level M&E guidelines
* Systems-level research guidelines.

**Aims and objectives of the framework**

The goal of a M&E framework will be to establish the necessary monitoring tools, and use them to gauge the success of the implementation plan.

Key indicators may include those identified in a communication implementation plan, such as:

* Improvement in levels of confidence in biotechnology safety.
* An active corps of contributors (scientists & general) to various communication activities, including media activity.
* A growing list of dedicated media contacts.
* An expanded communication partners list - a network of active sources providing a consistency of messages.
* High degree of story uptake in the media with a consistency of messages getting across.
* A wide range of resources, developed by communicators and collaborators, which are publicly available and upon request.
* Increased coverage and improved sentiment (positive responses) across social media.

The process of developing an M&E framework may modify or add to these initial proposed indicators.