

What does policy implementation monitoring entail?

March 2010

This rapid response was prepared by the Uganda country node of the Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative.

Key messages

When monitoring a program or policy, we assess whether the program is being implemented in line with the implementers' expectations.

- When in the planning stage of a monitoring program or framework, one needs to find out whether monitoring is necessary at all.
- Monitoring is not worthwhile if data will remain unused.
- A good plan should be established ahead of time advising on how things will be handled if monitoring reveals gaps between the actual on ground and that that is expected.
- Indicators should be valid, acceptable, feasible, reliable, sensitive to change and have good predictive validity.
- Policymakers need to establish whether there is a monitoring system in place that can be used or modified or whether a new system needs to be set up. This will help to determine the feasibility and costs of monitoring.



Who requested this rapid response?

This document was prepared in response to a specific question from a policy maker in Uganda.

! This rapid response includes:

- **Key findings** from research
- **Considerations about the relevance** of this research for health system decisions in Uganda

X Not included:

- Recommendations
- Detailed descriptions

What is SURE Rapid Response?

SURE Rapid Responses address the needs of policymakers and managers for research evidence that has been appraised and contextualised in a matter of hours or days, if it is going to be of value to them. The Responses address questions about arrangements for organising, financing and governing health systems, and strategies for implementing changes.

What is SURE?

SURE – Supporting the Use of Research Evidence (SURE) for policy in African health systems - is a collaborative project that builds on and supports the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (**EVIPNet**) in Africa and the Regional East African Community Health (**REACH**) Policy Initiative (see back page). SURE is funded by the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme.

www.evipnet.org/sure

Glossary

of terms used in this report:

www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary

Background

Monitoring that is done well allows policy makers, government officials, development managers, and civil society to learn from past experiences, improve service delivery and plan and allocate resources. In addition, it helps us to demonstrate accountability to key stakeholders.

For this document, monitoring will be defined as the process of systematically collecting data to assess whether the program is being implemented in line with the implementers' expectations. Usually indicators are tracked over time and space to determine whether these are changing due to the policy or strategy.

How this Response was prepared

After clarifying the question being asked, we searched for systematic reviews, local or national evidence from Uganda, and other relevant research. The methods used by the SURE Rapid Response Service to find, select and assess research evidence are described here:

www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods

Summary of findings

When considering a system for monitoring the implementation of a policy or program, a policy maker has got to start by answering several questions:

- a. Is monitoring necessary?
- b. How will the data be used?
- c. What actions will or should be taken if monitoring reveals that things are not going as planned?
- d. What should be measured?
- e. What arrangements are needed and what will these cost?
- f. Who will do the monitoring and what knowledge and skills should they have?

a) Is monitoring necessary?

The necessity of monitoring depends on:

- The perceived needs among pertinent stakeholders to have reliable information about the extent to which a policy or program is implemented and working according to plans
- The extent to which data that are collected will be used
- The extent to which appropriate actions will be taken if monitoring reveals that things are not going as planned.

b) How will the data be used?

Monitoring is only meaningful if the data will not only be collected but will be put to good use, for example, to:

- Reduce important uncertainties about implementing a policy or program
- Identify the need for corrective actions, if things are not going as planned
- Support continuation of the policy or program, if things are going as planned

c) What actions will or should be taken if monitoring reveals that things are not going as planned?

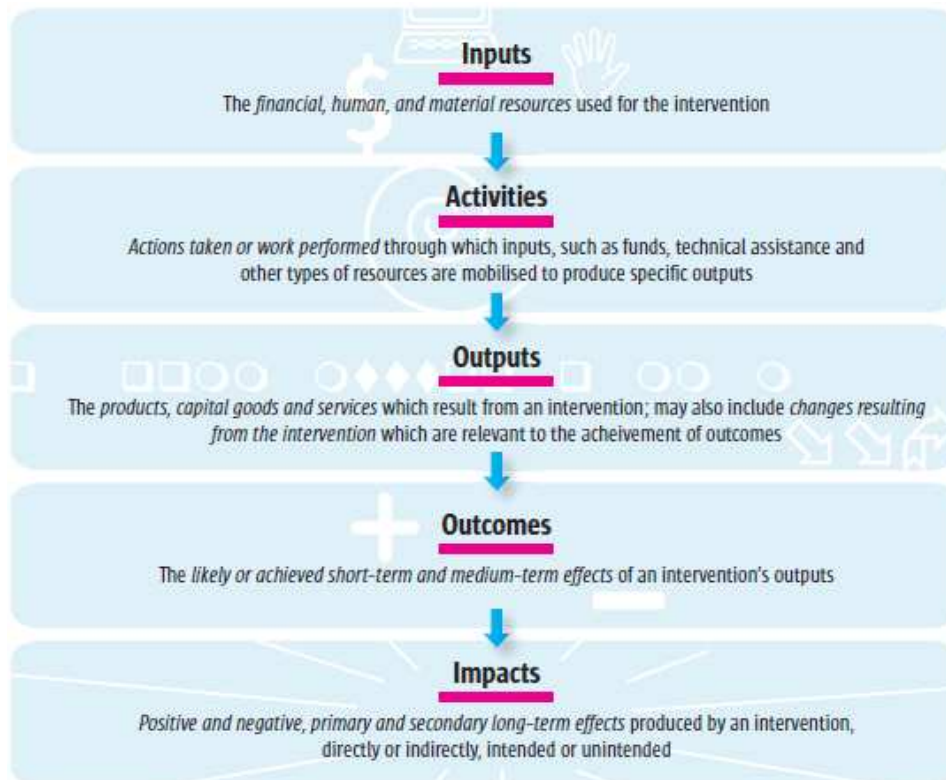
A good plan needs to be put in place ahead of time regarding what will be done if monitoring reveals a divergence from what is expected. If there is no plan, the results of monitoring may go unused or throw the planners into disarray, especially if there is disagreement about how things 'went wrong'.

d) What should be measured?

Indicators of the progress of a policy or program include quantitative and qualitative factors or variables that provide a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to the policy or program, or to help assess performance. They may be a simple count of events or based on various data sources. Policymakers need to decide:

- Whether to focus on all or part of the implementation and results chain (i.e. on inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes or impacts - see Figure 1)
- What indicators will provide good measure of the extent to which things are going as planned for those parts that are monitored
- What the targets are for selected indicators; i.e. quantified levels of an indicator to be achieved at a given point in time

Figure 1. Results chain*



*From Fretheim 2009.

Characteristics of a good indicator include:

- **Relevance:** that the extent to which the indicator reflect the objectives of monitoring the program or policy
- **Validity:** the extent to which the indicator accurately measures what it claims to measure
- **Reliability:** the extent to which the indicator can be collected with minimal measurement error, or the findings could be reproduced if collected by someone else
- **Acceptability:** the extent to which the indicator is acceptable to all parties in the data collection process, i.e. those being assessed and those assessing it
- **Feasibility:** the extent to which valid, reliable and consistent data are available for collection
- **Sensitivity to change:** of the extent to which the indicator is able to detect changes in the unit of measurement
- **Predictive validity:** the extent to which the indicator has the ability to accurately predict relevant outcomes

e) What are the arrangements are needed and what will these cost?

Policymakers need to establish whether:

- There is already a monitoring system in place with relevant indicators
- There is a system in place, but requiring modification for the current purpose
- A new system needs to be set up

This will help to establish costs related to data collection and the capacity to analyze and disseminate data to managers, healthcare providers and relevant stakeholders. In many circumstances there may be trade-offs between the desired or optimal indicators and what is available using existing data sources. Similarly, there may be trade-offs between what is desirable in terms of how frequently an indicator should be monitored and the cost of more frequent data collection. Involving key stakeholders in developing a monitoring plan can help to ensure that appropriate decisions are made about these trade-offs.

f) Who will do the monitoring and what knowledge and skills should they have?

Establishing and managing appropriate monitoring of a policy or program requires a team of people with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the objectives of the policy or program and how it will be implemented
- Initiate and implement organizational arrangements and procedures to maximize cooperation and participation of all relevant parties
- Identify factors that should potentially be monitored
- Prioritize those factors
- Select appropriate indicators
- Determine what resources are needed and the costs of monitoring
- Develop and manage a monitoring system capable of generating valid and reliable data
- Analyze the data that are collected and draw conclusions
- Make recommendations for corrective actions, if needed
- Communicate with colleagues and clients before, during and after the monitoring process
- Manage personnel within the team responsible for monitoring and contributing data (e.g. healthcare providers)
- Plan and budget for the monitoring process

References

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Conflicts of interest

None known.

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