



Preparing Action Plans

A central theme of this volume is that there is no “best” model of what a government or sectoral M&E system should look like. Countries differ substantially in the emphasis they choose to give to the different purposes of an M&E system—such as to support budget decision making or ongoing management of activities, or for accountability purposes.

And each country is unique in terms of its M&E activities, functions, and systems and in terms of its public sector culture and environment. Thus, an action plan to create or strengthen an existing government system for M&E has to be tailored closely to country circumstances. This is why it is so important to conduct a diagnosis of a country’s M&E strengths and weaknesses as a basis for developing an action plan (chapter 12).

Vision for the Future System

A diagnosis might ideally lead to a clear statement of what the M&E system would desirably look like at some time in the future. The dimensions of the system—its architecture—would include, in particular, the following elements:

1. Which of the four possible uses of M&E information will be the objectives of the system, recognizing the trade-offs between them: to support budget decision making or national planning; to help ministries in policy formulation, policy analysis, and program development; to support ministries and agencies in managing their activities; or to strengthen accountability relationships (chapter 3).
2. The formal roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders of the M&E system—those who would be expected to produce monitoring information and evaluations and to make use of them. It is important to locate responsibility for management or oversight in a powerful ministry, committee, or other entity.
3. Whether a whole-of-government system, including all central ministries, sector ministries, and agencies, is to be developed or if the system is to be more narrowly focused on individual sectors or agencies. Some governments develop an M&E system only for donor-funded operations in their country.¹
4. The levels of government at which the M&E system will be developed: central, state/provincial, or local.

5. The range of M&E tools on which the system will focus: performance indicators, rapid evaluations, rigorous impact evaluations, and so forth. It is possible to create a reliable performance monitoring system without conducting any evaluations; however, conducting evaluations requires good performance information, either from a monitoring system or from special surveys, or both.

Implementation Issues

Once the vision of the fully functioning M&E system has been formulated, it is possible to develop an action plan to achieve it. This action plan should draw on the international lessons from building country M&E systems (chapter 10). Of course, it would not make sense to develop an action plan unless there is already some substantive demand for M&E within the government.

An action plan can also be designed to strengthen demand, for example, by ensuring that all key stakeholders play some substantive part in planning or managing the M&E system, such as through their involvement in an oversight or planning committee. Particular incentives might need to be created to further strengthen demand; these incentives could involve a mixture of carrots, sticks, and sermons (chapter 11). In other words, it would be a mistake to create an action plan that focused purely on technocratic, supply-side issues.

Strengthening an existing M&E system or building an entirely new one can be approached in many ways. Implementation issues that need to be addressed in an action plan include the following:

- The extent to which there will be a focus on strengthening what already exists: improving financial management information systems (to track budget appropriations and actual spending) or improving ministries' monitoring systems, especially administrative data on government activities, beneficiaries, and outputs (note that these data are typically collected at the facility level).
- Whether new approaches should be piloted, with a view to their subsequent mainstreaming if successful. These could include the implementation of new, formal requirements for

M&E in pilot ministries or agencies, for example, where there already exists a strong commitment to conducting and using M&E and where there is already some successful track record. Pilots could be developed at other levels, such as in individual states or municipalities. Pilots such as rapid evaluations or rigorous impact evaluations could also be envisaged for particular evaluation tools if there is little or no experience with them in the country.

- When and how quickly mainstreaming should occur. In Chile, for example, particular M&E tools were mainstreamed in a sequential manner: performance indicators in 1994, rapid reviews in 1996, rigorous impact evaluations in 2001, and comprehensive spending reviews in 2002 (chapter 6). Mexico is planning to mainstream its new, whole-of-government M&E system over a three-year period (2007–09) (Hernandez 2007).

The speed of implementation of an action plan is clearly very important. There is an issue here of “digestibility”—how much M&E change or reform ministries and agencies can absorb, and how quickly. We have learned from countries that have successfully created an M&E system that it is a long-haul effort requiring patience and persistence (chapter 10); M&E champions in government, in contrast, tend to be impatient when reforming their M&E systems. Another lesson is to institutionalize an M&E system as rapidly as possible before the champion(s) eventually depart.

As emphasized in chapter 10, it is helpful to regularly monitor and evaluate the M&E system itself, to identify how successfully its various components are being implemented. This provides a sound basis for any needed changes to the nature, scale, and timing of implementation of the action plan. And this is obviously important if a pilot approach has been adopted.

Action plans may focus on some or all of the following stakeholders: government ministries and officials, such as central and sectoral ministries and agencies; subnational governments at the state, province, or district levels; the Parliament or Congress, including elected representatives, committees, and their staff; and civil society groups, in-

cluding universities, research institutes, and NGOs. Commonly adopted actions could include, for example, providing M&E training; promulgating any necessary laws, decrees, and regulations; preparing M&E guidelines and standards; strengthening and harmonizing monitoring systems; and conducting a range of types of evaluation, such as rapid reviews and rigorous impact evaluations.

Trade-Offs

There are many issues and trade-offs to consider when developing an action plan. One is that a whole-of-government M&E system that is managed by the finance ministry for purposes of performance budgeting would need to ensure broad coverage of all programs. One way to achieve breadth of coverage is to rely on performance indicators; their drawback, however, is that they usually provide little information on the reasons results have been achieved or not—in other words, the causes of good or bad performance.

Rapid reviews can provide some insights into causality, and as they are cheaper than some other evaluation methods, they can also provide relatively broader coverage of government programs. The most reliable evaluation findings can come from a rigorous impact evaluation, although these can be very expensive to conduct, so it is harder for a finance ministry to use them to evaluate a broad range of programs (chapter 2). There is often a trade-off between choice of M&E tools and the desired uses of M&E information.

Another trade-off is between who commissions evaluations and who is meant to use them. Chile's finance ministry commissions a range of types of evaluation and uses them effectively for its own purposes; but sector ministries and agencies are highly resistant to using these evaluations for their own, internal purposes—the entities do not “own” the evaluation findings (chapter 6). It can be difficult for a centrally imposed M&E system to be accepted by sector ministries.

Australia's finance department endeavored to address this by leaving to sector ministries the prime responsibility of planning and conducting evaluations—this ensured they had a high ownership of evaluation findings (chapter 8). However, this

ownership had a cost: up to one-third of the evaluations suffered from some kind of methodological weakness.² This is indicative of another trade-off: internally conducted evaluations may have high ownership, but external evaluations may be more likely to be rigorous and objective.

A simple results chain for building an M&E system is shown in figure 13.1. This provides a simplified representation of how an action plan would be expected to lead to various kinds of output, such as the number of officials trained in M&E, the number of evaluations conducted, and so on. These outputs in turn would be expected to lead to intermediate outcomes such as strengthened government demand for M&E, and to final outcomes, including the utilization of monitoring information and evaluation findings by government and others. It would be hoped that these outcomes would help lead to final impacts, including improved government performance, improved development effectiveness, improved service provision, and poverty reduction.

Menu of Actions to Improve M&E

Table 13.1 presents a menu of possible actions to achieve improvements in the demand for and supply of M&E. This menu is far from comprehensive. Rather, it illustrates the range and nature of actions that can be taken to build or to strengthen systems for monitoring and evaluation. One example of an action plan, which follows directly from a diagnosis of M&E in a country, is shown in box 9.2 for Uganda.

Another example is the World Bank project developed to help the government of Colombia strengthen its national M&E system, SINERGIA (chapter 7; annex B). This \$14 million project has four components: (1) support better monitoring of government spending at the regional and local levels; (2) consolidate the institutionalization of SINERGIA within the government; (3) support the development of regional and local M&E systems, partly through a pilot approach; and (4) establish mechanisms to improve the quality, relevance, and cost-effectiveness of public information. This project is based on the Bank's diagnosis of SINERGIA (annex B). This project also includes a large

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Figure 13.1: A Results Chain for Building a Government M&E System

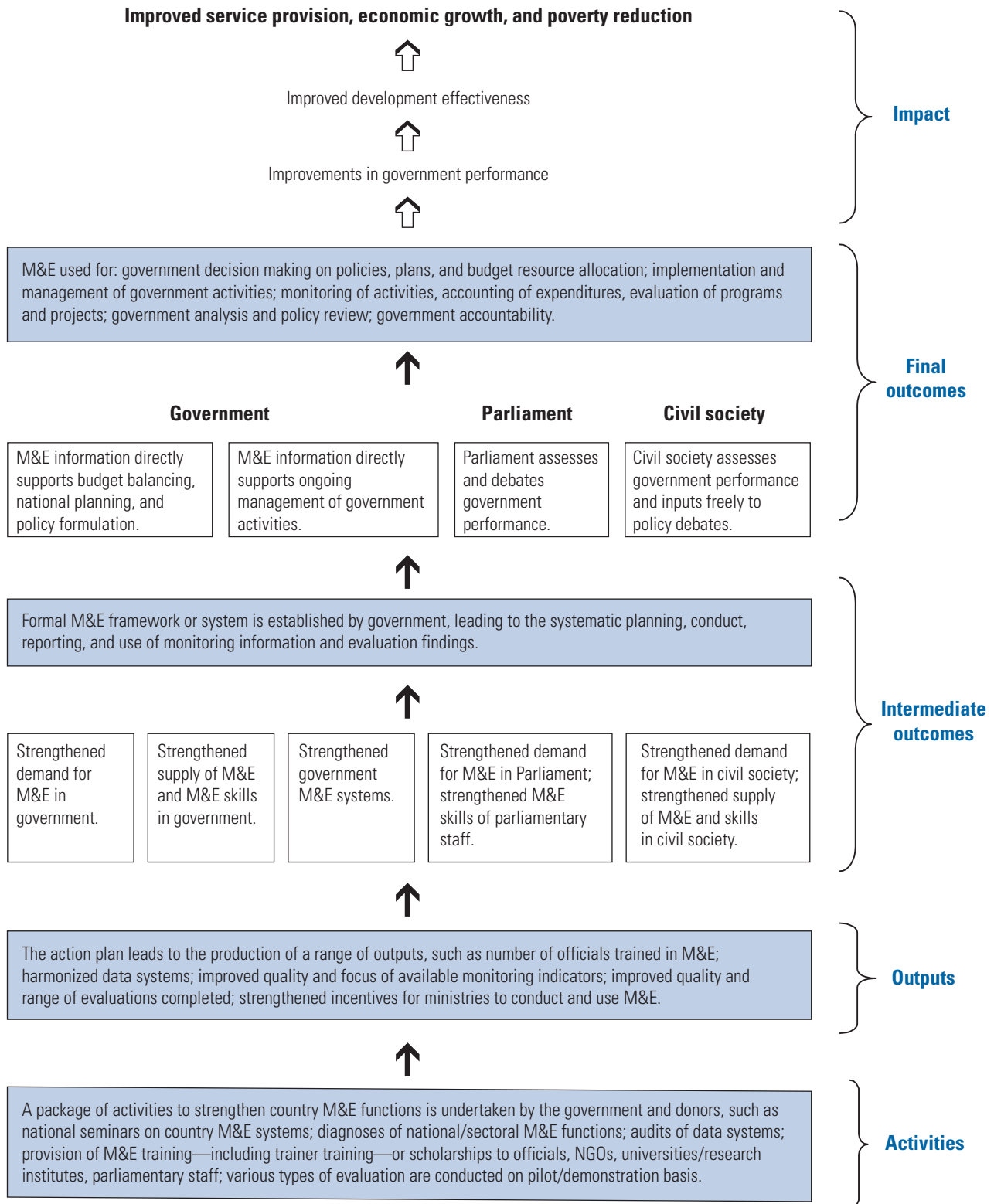


Table 13.1: Possible Actions to Strengthen M&E Systems at the Country/Sectoral Levels

Strengthen government demand for M&E		Strengthen supply and develop M&E skills within government		Strengthen M&E systems		Strengthen demand for M&E in civil society, Parliament		Strengthen supply and development M&E skills in civil society, Parliamentary staff	
Provide carrots, sticks, and sermons to strengthen demand (see table 11.1).									
Donors advocate M&E and focus on <i>results</i> . Disseminate examples of influential evaluations.				Donors preserve and disseminate experience of other countries with M&E systems.	Donors advocate M&E and focus on <i>results</i> . Disseminate examples of influential evaluations.		Donors preserve and disseminate experience of other countries with M&E systems.		
Donors preserve and disseminate experience of other countries with M&E systems.				Coordinate/harmonize donor country M&E.	Donors preserve and disseminate experience of other countries with M&E systems.		Hold national brainstorming seminars on options for government M&E systems.		
Hold national brainstorming seminars on options for government M&E systems.					Hold seminars on donor evaluation findings (for example, World Bank's) relevant to the country—demonstrate the usefulness of evaluation.				
Hold regional seminars on government M&E systems.				Foster regional networks of M&E managers and practitioners—a community of practice.	Hold seminars on donor evaluation findings (for example, World Bank's) relevant to the country—demonstrate the usefulness of evaluation.				
Conduct national/sectoral diagnosis of M&E functions—highlight problems and opportunities.				Conduct national/sectoral data audits. Conduct diagnosis of organizations that provide M&E training.	Conduct national/sectoral diagnosis of M&E functions—highlight problems and opportunities.		Conduct national/sectoral diagnosis of M&E functions—highlight problems and opportunities.		Conduct diagnosis of organizations that provide M&E training.
Embed M&E as component of donor/government public sector management and public expenditure management work.				Embed M&E as component of related public sector management/public expenditure management work, for example, on performance budgeting.	Donors give loans to support M&E systems. Link efforts to strengthen M&E systems with other performance-related government reforms.		Conduct service delivery surveys of client satisfaction and perceptions of the quality of government surveys and publicize the results widely (for example, CRCs).		

(Table continues on next page)

Table 13.1: Possible Actions to Strengthen M&E Systems at the Country/Sectoral Levels (continued)				
Strengthen government demand for M&E	Strengthen supply and develop M&E skills within government	Strengthen M&E systems	Strengthen demand for M&E in civil society, Parliament	Strengthen supply and development M&E skills in civil society, Parliamentary staff
	<p>results-based management and strategic planning; sectorwide approaches; sectoral reform programs; service delivery; financial management and accountability, including financial management information systems; statistical system capacity building (statistics offices, ministry management information systems, statistics production, including service delivery surveys); national audit office capacity building; government decentralization.</p>			
<p>Identify and support M&E champions. Promote collaboration among all key government stakeholders in the M&E system—especially in planning and oversight of the system.</p>		<p>Encourage stronger government internal coordination of M&E, including links between M&E, budget, planning and ministry, and management info systems.</p>		
<p>Seek to mandate M&E via government decisions, decrees, regulations, and laws.</p>	<p>Disseminate evaluation standards and methods.</p>	<p>Seek to mandate M&E through government decisions, decrees, regulations, laws. Develop M&E guidelines and manuals.</p>	<p>Seek to mandate M&E through government decisions, decrees, regulations, laws. Introduce freedom-of-information legislation.</p>	<p>Disseminate evaluation standards and methods. Support research institutes, universities, NGOs to evaluate and review government performance—for example, CRCs, budget analysis.</p>
	<p>Provide training in a range of M&E tools, methods, and techniques to officials—at national, state, municipal levels.</p>		<p>Encourage media to report on government performance.</p>	<p>Train parliamentarians and staff to analyze government performance. Provide a range of M&E training in a range of M&E tools, methods, and techniques to staff of universities, NGOs, and so forth.</p>

	Provide M&E trainer training and support for civil service colleges, for example, via twinning arrangements with developed country counterparts.		Provide M&E trainer training and support for universities/research institutes, for example, via twinning arrangements.
	Review ministries' performance indicators. Strengthen ministries' management information systems. Support service delivery surveys.		
Create a fund for evaluation.	Create/staff M&E/statistics/policy analysis units.		Create evaluation fund—allow civil society access.
Promote donor funding of major impact evaluations/reviews—to demonstrate feasibility and utility.	Donors fund major evaluations/reviews—on “public good” grounds.		Donors subcontract evaluations/reviews to universities/research institutes.
	Allow greater donor reliance on national M&E expertise when conducting evaluations.	Allow greater donor reliance on government to undertake M&E of donor-funded projects and programs.	Encourage civil society and parliamentary scrutiny of government evaluation reports.
	Support development of government evaluation networks and national evaluation associations.		Support development of national evaluation associations.
Seek donor support for joint evaluations with governments and for country-led evaluations.	Donors support joint evaluations with governments and country-led evaluations.		

Note: If actions in these five columns are similar or related, this can be seen by looking along each row. CRC = citizen report card; NGO = nongovernmental organization.

number of planned diagnoses of more detailed, specific issues:

- A review of existing institutional arrangements, particularly the extent to which M&E information from SINERGIA has been used to support national planning and budget decision making. This review will recommend increasing the government's level of utilization of M&E information.
- A review of M&E structures, institutional arrangements, and capabilities in two line ministries. This will help establish M&E quality standards, which will be required of all ministries and agencies.
- An assessment of the M&E capabilities of the unit in the DNP that manages SINERGIA and provides technical assistance to other ministries and agencies.
- A review of existing laws, decrees, and regulations relating to M&E.
- A review of the cost, quality, and cost-effectiveness of the various evaluation tools and techniques currently used in the SINERGIA system.
- A diagnosis of the capacities needed to establish PBB.
- A diagnosis of the quality and utilization of performance information and of information systems in two pilot municipalities.
- An assessment of mechanisms for local accountability in some good practice municipalities.
- An assessment of the methodology currently used by the DNP to assess the performance of all 1,100 municipalities in Colombia.
- A review of data quality and the extent of data harmonization among the main monitoring systems in Colombia's central government.
- An assessment of the quality, relevance, and use of the DNP's main system for monitoring government performance.

Conclusions

A useful strategy for building a government system for M&E is to start with a diagnosis of current M&E activities within the government. At the same time, a vision of what a well-functioning system would look like should be developed. These basic building blocks naturally lead to the development of an action plan, including a phased approach to its implementation.

By now it should be abundantly clear that it would not make sense to attempt to apply a standardized, "cookie-cutter" approach to developing a government M&E system. The action plan for building a government M&E system needs to be tailored closely to each country's individual circumstances and to the government's particular vision of the future system. This vision would encompass the specific uses to which it intends to put monitoring information and evaluation findings, whether that is to be a whole-of-government system or an individual ministry or agency, the levels of government to which it will apply, the particular range of M&E tools to be adopted, and so on.

There are many possible dimensions to an M&E system, and there are many trade-offs to be considered carefully. An action plan for building an M&E system does not have to be enormously complex, although there is always the danger that the desired system will be overdesigned and thus much harder to achieve; it is very much the case that less is more. A similar danger is that the speed with which a system can be built will be overestimated.

A concrete action plan provides a focus for key stakeholders in the government and for donors. It also provides a yardstick against which actual progress toward the vision of the future M&E system can be gauged—by regular M&E of both the system and the action plan. This will not only facilitate identification of emerging opportunities; it will also enable any implementation difficulties to be identified early and addressed. The emergence of roadblocks and opportunities explains the experience of many countries: because of these challenges, government M&E systems are usually not developed in a linear, predictable manner (chapter 10).

The international community is still accumulating experience on how best to strengthen government M&E systems—which approaches and systems are most effective and in which types of country, such as in middle-income countries or in poor countries with very weak capacities. This underlines the importance of further building the body of evidence concerning how best to institutionalize an M&E system. These and other frontier issues are considered in Part V.