

MONITORING

This chapter contains:

1. An explanation of the differences between monitoring and evaluation
2. Descriptions of three major areas for monitoring:
 - *Conflict and context*
 - *Implementation*
 - *Progress toward results*
3. An explanation of how monitoring is incorporated into design frameworks
4. An example of a monitoring plan

INTRODUCTION

“Where are we going?” asks the passenger as the vehicle races across the desert. “I don’t know,” replies the driver, “but we’re getting great gas mileage.”

- Excerpt from the film “Sahara.”

As illustrated in the above quote, much of the challenge in monitoring involves connecting relevant information to strategic decisions. This chapter discusses the relationship between monitoring and evaluation. It also covers the three basic types of monitoring in peacebuilding: the conflict context, program implementation, and progress toward results. Certain key or fundamental assumptions may require monitoring as well. In addition, the chapter briefly discusses reporting and explains how monitoring is integrated in the different design frameworks. An example of a monitoring plan is provided at the end.

Monitoring is an ongoing process that generates information to inform decisions about the program while it is being implemented.

How is monitoring different from evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation are different sides of the same coin, which is but one of the coins in the currency of learning. Other coins in the currency of learning include action research, reflection, reading, coursework, literature research, and participatory rapid appraisals to mention only a few.

Monitoring is an ongoing process that generates information to inform decisions about the program while it is being implemented. Monitoring differs from evaluation primarily in terms of when and how often it is done and the decisions it informs. Generally, monitoring starts earlier and continues more frequently than evaluation. The decisions that monitoring informs are practical and detailed, and often meet an immediate pressing need or question.

Evaluation is more a multi-part event than a continuous process, and it often focuses on a bigger picture or on more complex issues such as why something happened. For example, in a program focused on the peace process, evaluation may look at overall advances in the peace process over time. Monitoring, in contrast, may focus on specific changes in communication channels, shifts in language on specific themes under negotiation, or changes in the number of alternatives under consideration by the parties.

Evaluation is more a multi-part event than a continuous process, and it often focuses on a bigger picture or on more complex issues such as why something happened.

Both monitoring and evaluation use data to inform decision-making and contribute to improved strategies. Both are also intended to generate lessons learned, although evaluation tends to contribute to more overarching lessons while monitoring contributes to more pragmatic or technical issues. Each of these disciplines demonstrates accountability. The following table illustrates some of the differences.

Distinguishing Monitoring and Evaluation

	Monitoring	Evaluation
What is it?	Ongoing collection and analysis of data on progress toward results, changes in the context, strategies, and implementation	Reviewing what has happened and why, and determining relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, etc.
Why do it?	Inform day-to-day decisionmaking Accountability and reporting	Strengthen future programming Provide evidence of success Deepen our understanding of how and why things work
Who does it?	Program Staff and/or Partners and/or Participants	External consultant, staff, participants or combination of these groups
When to plan	At design stage	Core decisions taken at design stage and refined prior to implementation
When to implement	Throughout the program – periodically, frequently or continuously	Mid-term (formative) Completion (summative) After completion (impact)

Why develop a monitoring practice?

Monitoring involves the use of reliable data in timely and informed decision-making. Data and information are the foundations of a monitoring practice. Too often people confuse data collection with monitoring. Program managers need to exercise the discipline to routinely collect, analyze, and reflect on information about their program at both the activity and outcome levels. Continuous, disciplined analysis of key program dynamics can result in profound improvements in relevancy, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact.

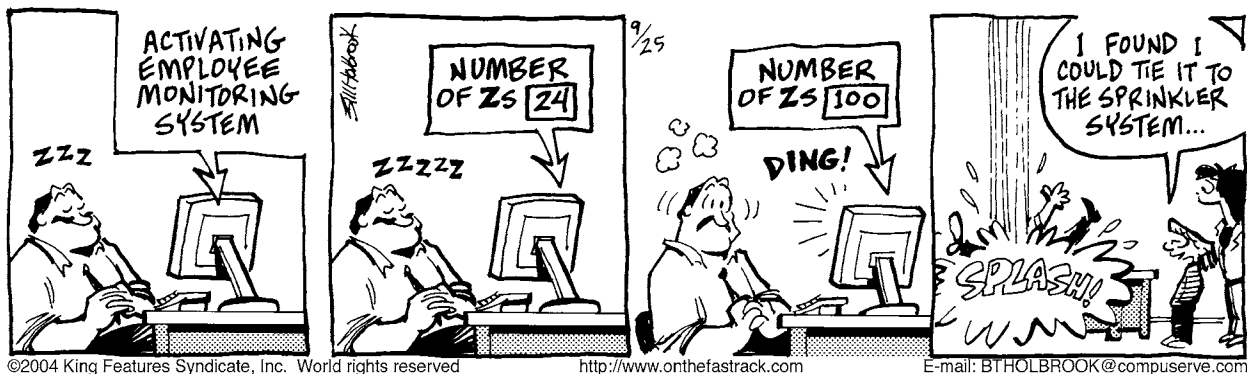
In development programs, where the needs are more static, monitoring often addresses the question, “Are we doing what we said we would do?”

Both monitoring and evaluation use data to inform decision-making and contribute to improved strategies.

Given the dynamic context of many conflicts, a more pressing question in peacebuilding is, “Are we doing what needs to be done?” In identifying what data to collect, consider which decisions the data will inform. Are there additional decisions to be made that lack data?

What is context monitoring?

Peacebuilding often takes place in a very fluid environment where circumstances can improve or deteriorate quickly. Monitoring the context helps peacebuilding practitioners anticipate changes, make proactive programmatic shifts, and ensure the safety of participants, partners, and staff. Context monitoring is the continuous updating and refinement of the conflict assessment.



How do we monitor the context?

Timely and continuous conflict analysis is both present- and future-focused and is essential in designing strategic interventions. Ideally, conflict assessments are living documents that are continuously updated and modified according to developments and changes. Repeating a complete conflict assessment every month is neither feasible nor desirable. However, there are often flashpoints or triggers that should be followed closely. Factors to consider are those that could escalate the conflict as well as those that could deescalate the conflict. Where the conflict has become cyclical, recognizing patterns can help anticipate periods of increasing violence.

Context monitoring is the continuous updating and refinement of the conflict assessment.

The frequent and repeated need for information makes many of the more formal means of data collection overly cumbersome. Context monitoring relies heavily on key informants - people who have unusual access to information and people who are engaged in analysis. This includes a wide range of people such as civil servants, university professors, editors and journalists, diplomatic officials, advisors attached to international organizations, and local leaders. Ad hoc meetings of people who are trying to make sense of recent developments and/or discrete advisory groups are

also sources of information. In addition, where possible, someone from within the organization should check in periodically and individually with people from the different groups in conflict.

For some organizations, monitoring the context is their only peacebuilding program intervention or strategy. Examples of context monitoring include the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, elections monitoring, cease-fire monitoring,¹¹ documentation of human rights abuses, early warning systems and many others.

A number of organizations specialize in early warning systems and make their information and projections available to others in the field. A comprehensive list and general description of conflict assessment and early warning tools can be found in *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding* (available online at http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource_pack.html). Two early warning organizations merit special mention: Swisspeace and the International Crisis Group.

- Swisspeace provides a periodic update on certain countries using the FAST methodology. The purpose of these updates is to provide development agencies, foreign ministries, international organizations, and NGOs with periodic risk assessments and early warnings. FAST continuously monitors and tracks social, political, and economic developments since these can indicate the potential for instability and violence.
- The International Crisis Group (ICG) produces high-quality thematic assessments that sometimes also serve an early warning function. Whereas FAST attempts to synthesize many events from several different fields, ICG provides a more in-depth assessment of specific dynamics, issues, or conflicts such as land tenure or terrorism.

These sources can be valuable supplements for busy practitioners, but they can never fully substitute for thorough local information. Practitioners must develop and maintain their own sources of information about the changing contexts in which they work.

Peacebuilding programs that neglect to routinely update their assessments do so at their peril. The interval between updates depends largely on the volatility of the conflict situation. Monthly updates are not unusual in a rapidly changing environment. Following an updated assessment of the context, a number of programmatic questions need to be reconsidered, such as:

- Are our assumptions about the context still valid?
- Are our interventions still strategic?
- Are there new opportunities?

¹¹ To learn more about the OSCE High Commissioner, see *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, edited by Luc Reychler and Thania Paffenholz (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001)

- Are there other activities that previously were not viable that might work now?
- What other approaches should we consider?
- If everything else has changed, why continue to do the same things we've always done?

Safety and security are very real considerations in almost all types of peacebuilding, particularly those that bring people in conflict into shared spaces. Whether working with domestic violence or in war zones, peace workers also need to ensure the safety of participants, partners, and staff. In war zones, the level of security frequently changes and up-to-date information is essential to keeping people out of harm's way. In most situations this means daily updates, although in some cases, hour-to-hour monitoring is needed.

Implementation monitoring tracks how the project is running and provides key information for decisions by project managers and participants as well as information for reports to supporters and stakeholders.

What is implementation monitoring?

Implementation monitoring tracks how the project is running and provides key information for decisions by project managers and participants as well as information for reports to supporters and stakeholders. It contributes to keeping the project moving forward. Most program managers tend to do this by comparing planned activities to implemented activities and the resulting outputs. The following example is typical of many implementation monitoring efforts where the focus and the information are limited to the activities or outputs, rather than higher level changes.

Example of Implementation Monitoring Data

Objective	Activity	Assumption	Data collected about activities
Local leaders from all communities collaboratively resolve inter-community disputes	Train community leaders	Women and men who receive training will use their new skills to resolve disputes	Number of men and women trained Number of training workshops held by location

Program managers could use this information for a number of important considerations.

Connection between Data and Decisions

Data	Decisions the data informs
Number of men and women trained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we training enough people? • Are we meeting the project deliverables? • Are enough women being trained?
Number of training workshops held by location and date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were workshops held in the targeted locations? • Were enough workshops held? • Were the workshops held at the right time?

Monitoring progress toward results implies monitoring progress toward change.

Data could also be collected on whether the individuals trained were part of the old or new leadership in the communities by tracking how long they have held their leadership positions. If age or religion are important factors, these could be tracked to ensure that the appropriate groupings are being included.

Programs are usually accountable to a number of constituents: participants, donors, partners, supporters, and the larger organization. Data from implementation monitoring can help explain to these constituents what has been implemented. Traditionally, reporting to donors focuses on planned versus accomplished outputs. Donors may want to know if the inputs were sufficient in both quantity and quality. Did the inputs result in the anticipated outputs? What activities have taken place? Who participated and how?

How do we monitor progress toward results?

Monitoring progress toward results implies monitoring progress toward change. This goes beyond simply reporting on planned versus actual activities and outputs. Here we want to use available data on the objectives and related indicators to inform decisions. Training in peacebuilding programs is an excellent example of an activity for which follow-up information about the application of new skills and knowledge is frequently missing.

Connection between Data and Decisions

Objective	Activity	Assumption	Data collected about activities	Data collected about changes
Local leaders from all communities collaboratively resolve inter-community disputes	Train community leaders	Women and men who receive training will use their new skills to resolve disputes	Number of men and women trained	New types of disputes where trained men and women are getting involved after the training

This data set informs a different series of decisions that program managers need to make while the program is still being implemented.

Connection between Data and Decisions

Data	Decision the data informs
Types of disputes where trained men and women are getting involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the training prepare people for the types of disputes they are encountering? • Do we need to focus on referral mechanisms for disputes that surpass competencies or jurisdiction? • Are there preventive measures that might be better suited for the types of disputes that are frequently being addressed by local leaders? • Are there types of disputes reserved specifically for women or for men? If so, what are those types?

Project indicators are signals that the objectives (changes) sought by a project have been reached, but those objectives will often not be reached until the end of the project. How does one monitor progress on these indicators during the course of the project when the changes won't occur until the project ends? Two common ways to cope with this challenge are outlined below.

- Ration the magnitude of the change. For example, X will increase by 10% in year one, 25% in year two, and will reach 100% by the end of year three. Some changes begin to manifest themselves early and continue throughout the program. Even though the full change will not be completed until year three, there may be incremental evidence of success during all three years of the program. Another common rationing device is by geographic region.
- Monitor steps within the process. For example, we may want to monitor specific steps in a larger process. In the example above, a process might include training, outreach, links to referral services, convening the parties, provision of dispute resolution service, quality control, and continuing education for practitioners. The assumption is that substantial progress needs to be made in the first year on training, cultivating referral sources, and outreach if the project is to succeed in three years.

What do we do with testimonials, anecdotes, and personal narratives?

It is important to record, preserve, and appropriately use testimonials, anecdotes, and narratives of personal stories and experiences. These can be wonderful sources of inspiration and insight as well as important opportunities for learning. Moving personal accounts help to put a human face on quantitative data, anchor program outputs in real life situations, and make reports relevant and more interesting. Occasionally, they

enlighten program staff about important new phenomena to monitor. The challenge in using testimonials for monitoring is in having enough testimonials about the same issues and enough additional types of information to validate conclusions and to accurately inform decisions. (For additional information on the liabilities of testimonials, see “Lovers, Haters, and Everybody Else” on page 221 of the Methods chapter.)

Why monitor our assumptions?

Periodically, we need to ensure that the assumptions inherent within the program logic remain valid. This review may occur in the context monitoring where assumptions are based on the situation. At times, it involves routinely collecting and analyzing additional data beyond what is anticipated within the indicators and objectives.

Periodically, we need to ensure that the assumptions inherent within the program logic remain valid.

Consider a program designed to reduce the incidence of farmer/herder disputes that escalate into violence in the Sahel. The initial assessment found nomadic pastoralists were frequently in conflict with settled agriculturalists during specific periods of migration. The program diligently tracked the numbers of people trained and serving as third-party neutrals, the use of third-party neutrals, efforts at publicizing prevention measures, the types of disputes, and the outcomes resulting from farmer/herder disputes.

Had the program staff members also monitored changes in the practices of the target groups, they would have found significant changes that would require them to reconsider their programming choices. Instead, they assumed the disputes would continue to be between nomads and fixed residents. A more in-depth look at who was participating revealed that many who were formerly strict agriculturalists were now practicing animal husbandry as well. Many disputes were no longer between itinerant visitors during specific times of the year but between neighbors all year long.

Should information be collected for each group involved?

The effort to collect information as part of a continuous monitoring practice should take careful consideration of the different groups involved. In particular, data needs to be disaggregated by gender and by other dimensions that define the participants in the conflict such as area of origin, age, religion, nationality, identity, and ethnicity. The initial assessment should indicate the areas of concern most relevant to the conflict. See page 216 of the Methods chapter for further information on data disaggregation.

How does monitoring fit with the logical and results frameworks?

At the design stage, the main components of a detailed monitoring and evaluation plan are summarized in the logical framework under columns labeled objectively verifiable indicators, means of verification, and assumptions. Having a detailed monitoring plan makes completing the logical framework much easier. Results frameworks often have a separate document which details the components of the monitoring and evaluation.

Continuous, timely information from the program about the changing context can facilitate rapid donor approval of needed modifications.

What do we do when monitoring indicates that we need to make a major programmatic shift?

In a very dynamic conflict, the timing of donor and administrative cycles rarely correspond with needed programming developments and modifications. The annual or three-year strategic plans that are common in development work risk becoming out of date in a dynamic conflict before they are even finalized. Proposals submitted to donors become irrelevant quickly when circumstances on the ground change dramatically.

The fluid context in a conflict may require an additional type of reporting. Many donors monitor the context independently and appreciate knowing how their partners view changes in the context. Continuous, timely information from the program about the changing context can facilitate rapid donor approval of needed modifications. Donors are much more interested in achieving higher level objectives than they are in implementing certain activities, particularly those activities that are no longer relevant. Candid and open discussions are the best means for developing acceptable alternatives within existing partnerships.

Example: Restorative Justice for Youth Program Monitoring Plan¹²

Consider a family group conferencing (FGC) program in New Zealand. Family group conferencing is part of a juvenile restorative justice program. The process was based on indigenous community justice practices of the Maori.

Goal: To heal the damage to victims, offenders, and communities caused by youthful offending.

Objective: Involve those most affected by the youth offenses to determine appropriate responses.

¹² Morris, Allison and Gabrielle Maxwell. 1998. "Restorative Justice in New Zealand: Family Group Conferences as a Case Study." *Western Criminology Review* 1 (1). [Online]. Available: <http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v1n1/morris.html>.

Monitoring plan a

Outcome-related data	Decisions that data informs	Frequency of data collection	Who collects data and how?
% of male/female offenders who feel involved in the restorative process	Does the process open opportunities for youth involvement? (Program management team)	Collected at the end of each conference	Self-reporting, written questionnaire
% of male and female victims who three months later still feel their interests have been addressed	Is there a need for follow-up? (Individual program managers) Are there ways to make the agreements more durable? (Program management team)	Collected at the end of each conference and three months later	Self-reporting written questionnaire, and follow-up phone call later
Number/Percentage of potential cases that chose FGC	Are more or less people inclined to choose FGC? (Program outreach team)	Quarterly	Service Coordinator from database

Activity: Conduct a family group conference.

Monitoring plan b

Output-related data	Decisions that data informs	Frequency of data collection	Who collects data and how?
Number of families offered FGC	Are outreach efforts contacting enough people?	Quarterly	Service Coordinator from database
Number of families offered FGC that complete the process	What percentage of the families that start the process finish it?	Annually	Service Coordinator from database

In addition to outcomes, this program may also need to monitor the assumptions implicit in its theory of change, which in this example is a combination of the individual change model and the healthy relationships model. One assumption is that restorative approaches reduce recidivism – in other words, there is a belief that young offenders who go through the program will be less likely to offend again. Another assumption is that strong social connections will prevent youth from offending people they know. Recidivism, even though not explicitly stated within an objective, is an important behavior to monitor in order to ensure that program assumptions are still valid. A large increase in recidivism might require the program to rethink its objectives and activities.