

Module 1: Effective communication, feedback and reporting systems in a PM&E process

Outcomes from using this module

You will understand:

- how to analyse the stakeholder groups you want to engage in PM&E, their different roles, and how they will work together in the process
- how to map the communication flows and connections between stakeholders engaged in PM&E and identify and address communication barriers and issues
- how to identify who needs your PM&E outputs, what they need to know, and when they need to know it
- how to assess your communication and reporting capacities and needs
- the need to factor in sufficient time for PM&E processes into reporting cycles
- some possible strategies for preventing communication problems

Introduction

Effective communication is important for all facets of an organisation's work, but is absolutely essential to the success of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E). This is because PM&E results must feed back into your work processes as a whole to influence decision making. This process inevitably involves multiple stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. Effective PM&E also requires that an ongoing cycle of questioning and critical reflection takes place in relation to the data produced through PM&E work. Ensuring that this communication of learning happens successfully will be a crucial challenge for those involved in all PM&E work and particularly any that is conducted within the type of framework that was developed as part of the AC4SC project.

This module provides a guide to asking the right questions in the planning stage of implementing the AC4SC methodology. It includes a timeline to indicate the points in the project cycle when information should be collected and shared. A simplified organisational diagram helps to explain who should typically be involved in this process of communication. It emphasises that the PM&E process and reporting on what is learned must fit into the whole cycle of the organisation's work and the expectations of external stakeholders. These processes should aim to build on and improve existing communication, feedback and reporting processes within the organisation rather than to create additional work or to alter existing methods that are already working well. The aim is to improve communication and planning systems within the organisation as a whole, not just M&E systems.

Who is involved and how do they work together as part of the PM&E process?

Thinking about the M&E research you *already* conduct, who is involved? They could be people or groups that are directly involved in producing, analysing and reporting on the research or they could be the anticipated beneficiaries of the research who they report to. Your answer might include:

- Members of the M&E team (but take care to note if they have distinct roles or responsibilities within the team).
- Internal stakeholders in your organisation, such as program makers, project managers, and country directors.
- Community members, the people who form the program audience or other project beneficiaries.
- External stakeholders directly involved in projects or program making, for example people from partner-NGOs, expert program advisers, or community reporters.
- Donor organisations that support projects and programs financially.
- Other organisations that might be conducting work that's similar to your own (possibly rivals, but hopefully, collaborators!)

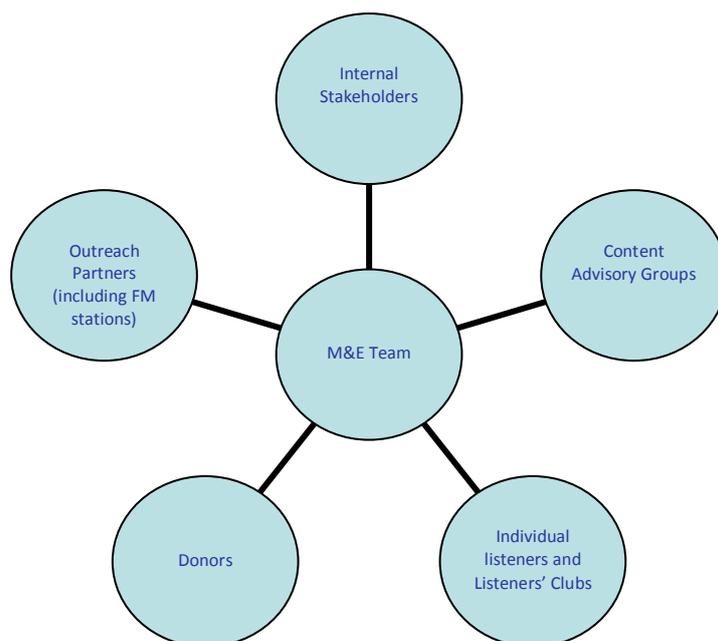
TIP: You can answer this question by producing a simple list using bullet points, as above. However, it might be more useful to create a mind map or 'spider diagram' with 'M&E team' in the centre, general description of stakeholders next (like those above), and then a set of second connections to these that contain the names of actual stakeholders. Visualising these connections may be helpful, even if you then convert your diagram into a list for easier inclusion in project documentation.

You can find a list of useful resources about stakeholder identification and analysis in the **Useful Resources** section of this toolkit.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

From the beginning, there have been different data sources and data collection methods which we have used under EAN's M&E framework. All of the people and groups involved in M&E research at EAN in the past are shown below:

M&E working relationships BEFORE the AC4SC project was implemented



Internal stakeholders: They included makers of the radio programs, the data base team, community reporters (who also collect some feedback from listeners) management team members, and our accounts and finance section.

Outreach partners: There were some outreach partners assigned to look after outreach activities, such as mobilizing listeners groups and collecting feedback from the listeners. Their progress reports helped us develop evaluation reports.

Individual listeners: They provided feedback via letters.

Listeners' clubs: There are many listeners clubs around Nepal (some deliberately formed by us, but most voluntarily formed), who listen to the radio program regularly.

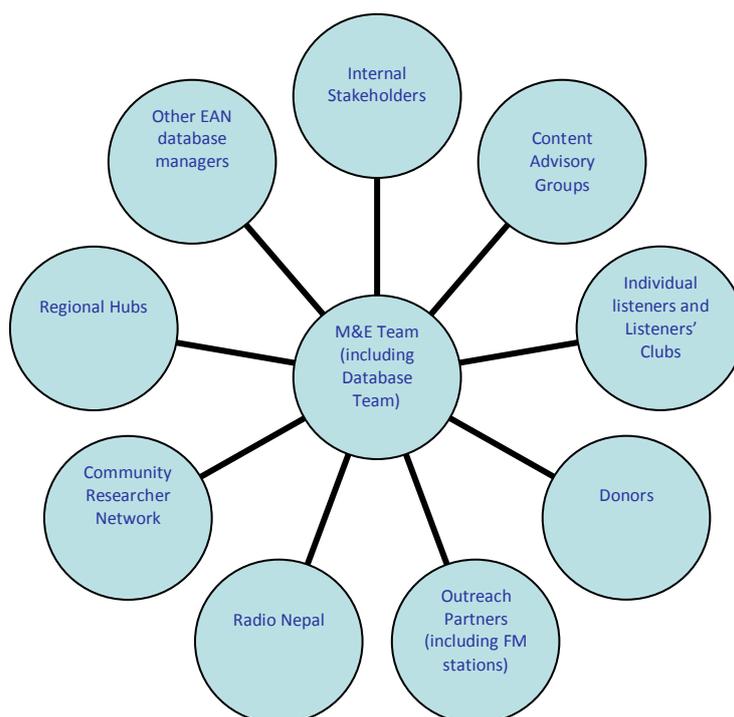
Donors: These are the organisations that provide the budget to operate our programs, which includes needs assessment, production, broadcasting, monitoring and evaluation)

M&E team: In the beginning there was a quite small team at EAN. There was only one person who was called an M&E coordinator and there were no other specified team members. Our letters database was managed separately and was only used for production of the SSMK radio program. Leadership of M&E was not very effective and wasn't even acknowledged by other program teams. The findings of our M&E activities were mostly quantitative, rather than qualitative.

Content Advisory Group (CAG): CAG meetings are for taking the advice from participants from different organisations for planning the content of the radio program. This is organised by content team members on the regular basis. Only content team members were involved in the activity and there was no involvement of M&E team in the process. It was more like a content team process only.

After the start of the AC4SC project, the level of engagement with communities by the M&E team has increased. They have been involved in research activities and in providing critical feedback for radio program development. Those research activities have produced research data which is analysed and triangulated with the other sources of data (such as listeners' letters) to enrich the network of embedded community researchers (CRs) who have been appointed to conduct some of our research activities. M&E research became better planned and more rigorous, and the team grew larger and had better leadership. It combined both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data to present enriched evidence of program development, program improvement and impact assessment. Now the new structure of M&E research at EAN looks like this:

M&E working relationships AFTER the AC4SC project was implemented



It is important to compare the list you make of those already involved in M&E work to those who might be involved in any new PM&E activities.

- If there are some anticipated differences, how will these new people be integrated into the process and what implications will this have?
- Are these entirely new types of stakeholder, or are they simply different people and groups that are similar to those you already work with in other ways?
- What level of involvement will each stakeholder group have in the PM&E process?

You need to ensure that you build in sufficient time for this step within your PM&E processes.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

We have definitely observed an increase in communication between content team members and the M&E team in the last three years. The value of M&E has been recognised by the content team members and they now see M&E as one of the major parts of the organisation. While writing funding proposals, an allocation of a separate budget for M&E became a necessary component. Content team member team now ask for more in-depth data to generalise feedback they receive about their different radio programs. The M&E team addresses this through analysis using many different forms of data from varied sources. There is frequent communication among M&E team members to address issues related to the monitoring and evaluation of different projects, to plan activities, reach agreement on indicators, and to develop the codebook and other tools we now use in our research. This has helped to internalise the responsibility related to different project's M&E works. We realised the value of dialogue between team members for better results.

Regular critical listening and feedback sessions have been introduced in EAN to provide feedback to the content team members. All of the program team members participate in these feedback sessions, which involve listening to the radio program that the M&E team randomly selected for the session. During these sessions the M&E team and other EAN staff provides critical feedback to content team members. This encouraged the content team members to review their work so as to create better radio programs in the future. On average, these sessions are being conducted bi-monthly for each radio program.

In addition, the Database Team are now fully integrated with the M&E Team and the Community Researcher Network is a major addition to the stakeholders involved in our working relationships.

It might be that the M&E team and its members are the difference! In other words, new types of M&E data may allow the team to contribute to aspects of other stakeholders work in new ways.

If that is the case, how will you work with these stakeholders to ensure that the M&E team's potential contribution is acknowledged and a working relationship established?

What Equal Access Nepal say:

There were different levels of understanding among program makers about the work of M&E at EAN. Initially they didn't understand the importance of M&E. However, this is how M&E now is contributing to the work of EAN:

- More involvement in program development through Content Advisory Group (CAG) meetings, Program meetings, Partner meetings, and Donor meetings. Program team members value the involvement of M&E in such meetings because they take constructive feedback from M&E, and also involve the M&E team in all the processes at EAN. There is also now more interaction with content team members.
- Multitasking: At any time the M&E team is working on different projects. Sometimes one person is involved in different projects and sometimes different people work together in a project.
- The M&E team have developed a range of M&E tools, such as a Short Questionnaire Survey (SQS) framework, and regular Research Plans and they contributed to the development of data collection templates and a detailed Most Significant Change (MSC) technique manual.
- We have developed 'SMART Indicators' to assess the impact of the radio programs. The M&E team now engages program team members whilst developing program objectives and setting indicators to measure the impacts of the radio programs. This process is encouraging program team members to internalise the output of M&E team works throughout the life of a project.
- There is regular discussion of ways to improve the M&E system.
- We have observed an increase in the quality of our reports and our evaluation reports are regularly used in the development of funding proposals.
- The capacity of M&E staff has increased in terms of their ability to use different research tools, manage complex M&E processes, and communicate their findings to stakeholders.
- EAN management values the involvement of M&E team with other program team members during the field visits.

- The involvement of M&E team members in all aspects of EAN's work has increased and we are now able to provide information related with program development, program improvement and impact assessment of the radio programs to the content team members whenever they ask for this. Content team members feel that it is easy to ask for data or conduct research with the M&E team. The CR Network has helped a lot to gather such information.
 - EAN now has a separate M&E room for team members to organise and conduct activities.
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It is very important that 'internal stakeholders', i.e. members of your own organisation, understand how PM&E will contribute to achieving the shared goals of your organisation. They need to understand what you are hoping to achieve through PM&E research (its principal aims), how you hope to make a positive contribution to *their* work, and also what *they* can do to help you. Setting up the project through this kind of internal stakeholder engagement is very important in order to facilitate the introduction of new M&E processes, especially if this will involve new communication needs and changing work routines or relationships. This process also needs strong support from leaders in your organisation.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

As long as there was little communication between M&E and content team members, there was less chance of understanding the value of M&E by content team members. Content team members didn't didn't usually take M&E findings into account because they were self assured about knowing the value of program content. They thought M&E had nothing to do with content production or the development of the radio programs and they also thought that M&E was only for the donor's requirements. Lack of communication and coordination between the program and M&E team reduced the chances of working in a coordinated way with each other, rather than meeting for the project outputs in a combined way.

Sometimes the content team and the M&E team were so busy that this affected regular interaction and cooperation. It's not exactly that we were not communicating but how we were communicating. There were always complaints from both sides. Members of the content team were always complaining: 'The M&E team is not giving us exactly what we want', while the M&E team was always complaining, 'You don't tell us what you exactly want'.

For both the M&E team and the content team, coordination was a major issue. Sometimes the content team faced the problem that M&E information was not provided on a timely or regular basis. If they were broadcasting content about HIV, for example, the content team wanted feedback on this content to come within one or two weeks at least, rather than three or four weeks. They wanted the M&E team to analyse it, triangulate it and then be able to say, 'These are impacts of your program', or 'The listeners want to listen on this topic'. If the M&E team was able to provide such immediate feedback, the content team thought they could improve their next program to make it better meet the needs of listeners.

TIP: It is important to engage in a regular process of critical reflection on your work. Organise regular opportunities for everyone to meet to discuss their perceptions of what is and isn't working in the

M&E process, including communication. It is important to build a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of your programs, as well as an appreciation of the difficulties everyone faces in fulfilling their commitments to the this process. Tools like the Keystone **Theory of Change** (TOC) templates used in the AC4SC project may help to facilitate these discussions and provide a clear indication of the objectives you need to reach in this early, formative part of the PM&E process. **Module 6: Getting started and planning for PM&E and impact assessment** provides an example of the development of a TOC. The **Useful resources, information and tools** section provides a link to the Keystone TOC tool.

Mapping communication flows onto organisational arrangements and stakeholder connections

Developing a clear picture of who is, and who needs to be involved in your PM&E work and what their roles are is a first important stage in the communication process. Identifying exactly what is communicated and how this is done is the next challenge. Doing this requires you to develop a more realistic organisational chart or diagram in order to visualize these connections. This will help you to:

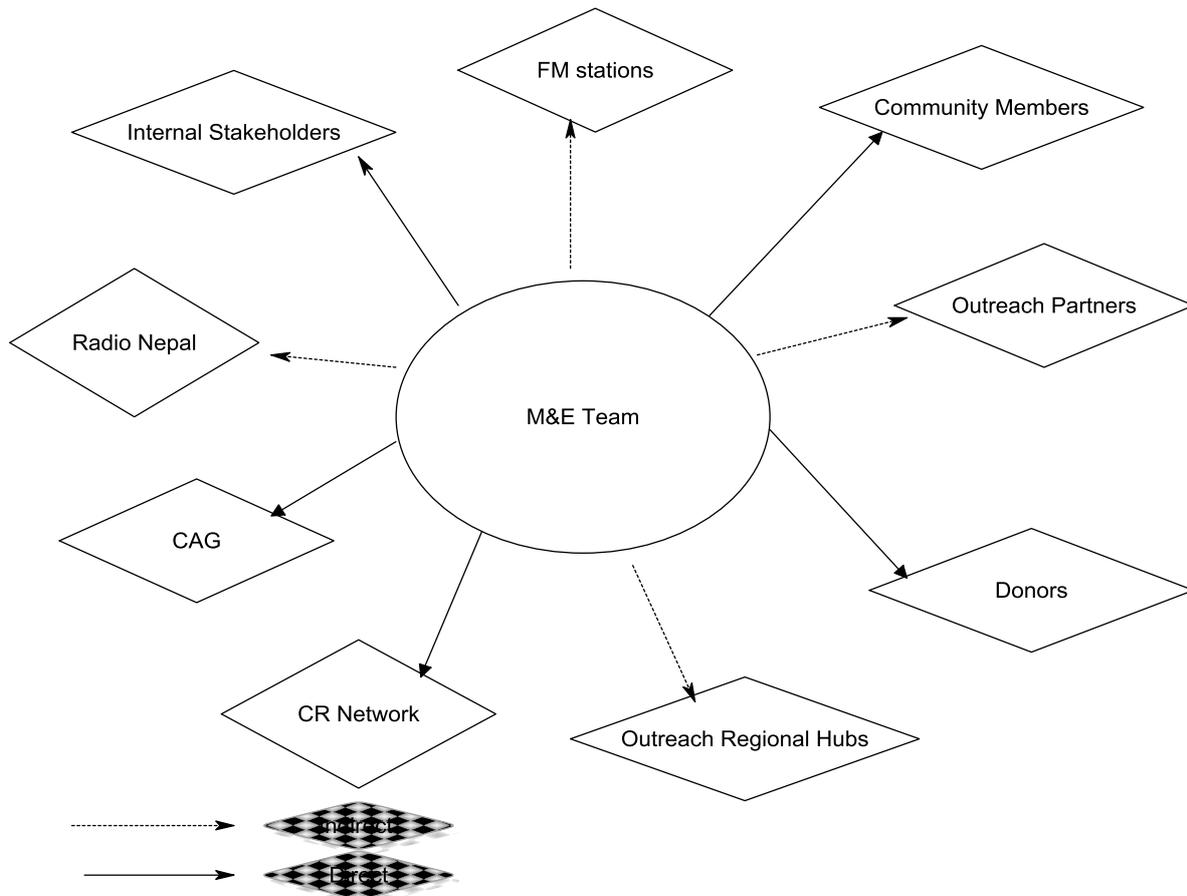
- Identify where there might be potential barriers to this flow of communication.
- Isolate relationships where there is no existing means of communication to cement the connection.
- Pinpoint types of communication tool or media that stakeholders may need further training to use effectively.

You may already have an organisational chart that you can amend to incorporate stakeholders who are specific to this M&E work. Otherwise, you can create this initially through trial and error to sketch the connections. These sketches can be perfected using a word processor or spreadsheet diagram, so they can be easily shared and revised as necessary. In order to work through this process you will need to organise a half-day workshop with key stakeholders. It may be useful for this process to be facilitated by an experienced external facilitator who understands the needs of your organisation.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

These are the stakeholders who directly or indirectly communicate and collaborate with EAN as a part of M&E process:

Simplified M&E communication process in EAN with M&E shown as central



Internal stakeholders: The M&E team has meaningful connections with internal stakeholders like the content team, outreach section, and management team members. Regular meetings with content team members is occurring to plan M&E work, develop different M&E tools to measure the impact of the radio programs, and to get feedback for program improvements. The M&E team works closely with the outreach section to monitor their activities.

FM stations: A majority of FM stations throughout Nepal are broadcasting EAN produced radio programs. Some FM stations broadcast EAN radio programs voluntarily, fulfilling the demand of listeners. They are not direct collaborators in M&E process. Recently M&E team encouraged program team to broadcast the Naya Nepal radio program through a FM station in Dang. Feedback from listeners and researcher showed that one big area of Dang, which also includes one of the research sites, was unable to listen to the Naya Nepal radio program.

Outreach partners: Some of the radio projects have partners to execute the outreach activities. EAN uses these outreach sites to study the impacts and feedback on the radio programs. For the AC4SC project, outreach partners are 'indirect' partners, but if we consider the whole M&E system they are 'direct' partners. The M&E team designs reporting templates, monitoring tools, etc., for outreach partners and they give feedback based on those.

Listeners clubs: There are lots of listeners clubs formed voluntarily, which have regular and irregular listeners who send their feedback to the program producers and take part in M&E research with the

CRs. In some places outreach partners facilitated the formation of listeners' clubs in some parts of Nepal.

Radio Nepal: Radio Nepal is the major collaborator with EAN for broadcasting its radio programs in Nepal.

Donors: Donors require EAN to provide regular progress reports and expect funding proposals to include log frames and indicators, etc.

CR Network: EAN is using a network of eight embedded community researchers around Nepal to conduct research mainly about two of its radio programs, Naya Nepal and SSMK. This network includes five different sites for research.

Content Advisory Groups (CAG): CAG meetings are for taking advice of the participating persons from different organisations to help plan the content for the radio program. These meetings are organised by content team members on a regular basis. Participants for the meetings will not be the same every time, but change over time depending on the program and different content topics under consideration. On a regular basis M&E team members are now invited by the content team members to participate in such meetings and give their input for better issues identification as stated in project documents. This is encouraging communication between content and M&E team members.

Community members: Involvement of community members with the works of EAN increased when the CR Network started working with the community members. More critical feedback about the radio program and more in-depth and richer data on the impacts of the programs on listeners is possible through the involvement of community members.

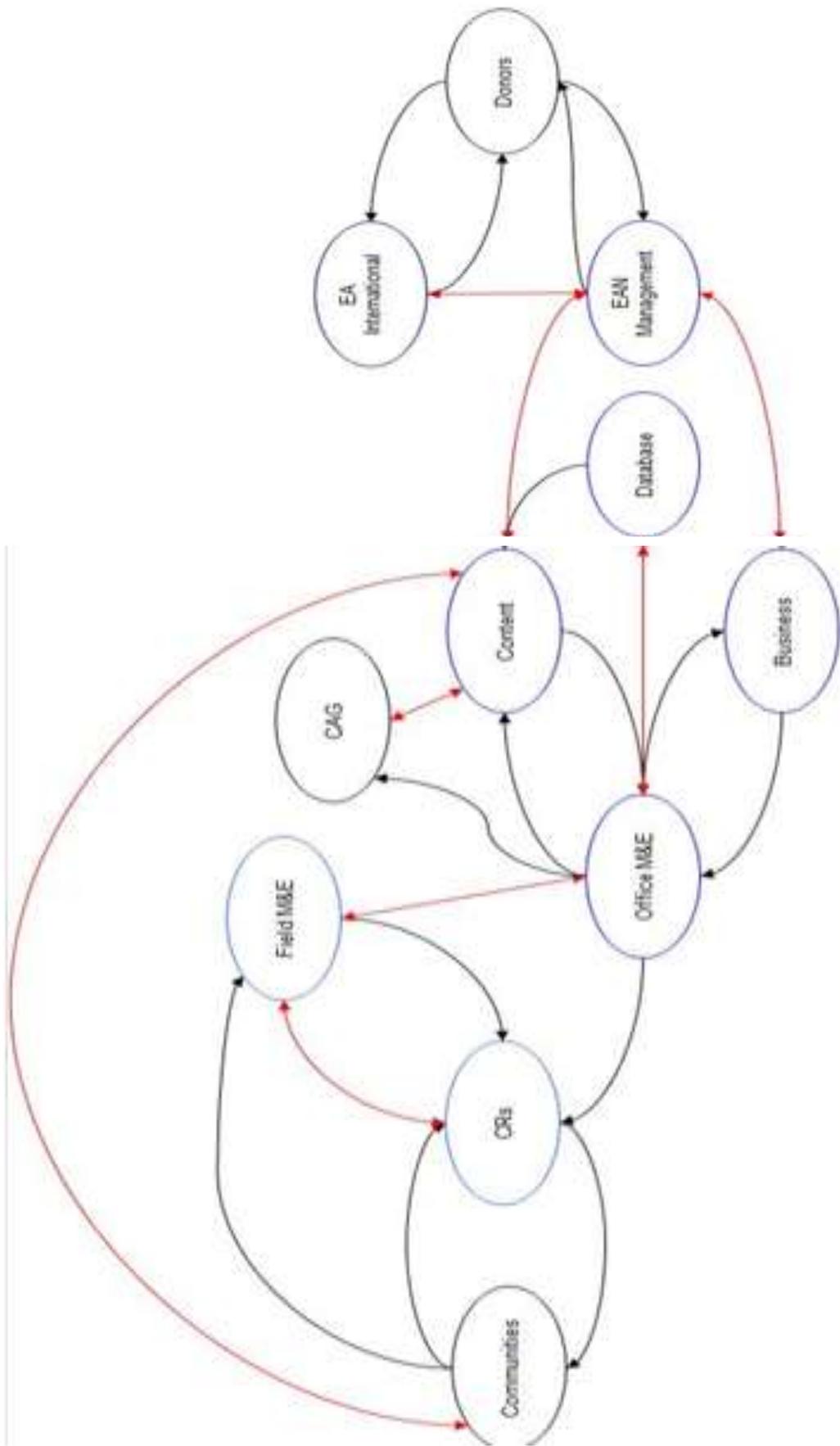
Outreach regional hubs: There are 5 regional hubs, one each in 5 development regions of Nepal. These regional hubs are responsible for managing outreach activities at field sites, for example conducting promotional activities for listeners clubs, broadcast monitoring, and conducting surveys and discussions.

M&E team: The M&E team has direct relations with most of the aforementioned stakeholders. Nowadays, program teams value M&E team's involvement in such activities related to different stakeholders.

The diagram at this stage shows a picture that is rather idealised and what the working relationships *should* be like in theory. How things work *in practice* very much depends on what is done to make these lines of connection a day-to-day reality for your organisation.

- Each line must involve some form of communication through which the relationship is formed and developed over time.
- In some cases these communications might already exist; if they do, indicate what they are on the diagram.
- If no communication exists at the present time or if it is only done in a fairly weak way, then the stakeholders involved will need to discuss what type of communication is needed and how it can be viably achieved to develop the relationship.
- If the stakeholders identify a need for some type of communication that they don't currently feel capable of using effectively, you will need to commit resources to training or other support to provide this link (see below).

Alternative diagram showing the flow of communication between stakeholders in the M&E process



What Equal Access Nepal say:

Frequent discussions with the content team members to develop M&E tools and analyse the findings of field visits and research has improved the relationship between internal stakeholders. The M&E team is able to meet the deadlines of different project's progress reports. During a stakeholders meeting in Kathmandu, participants questioned how we can generalise research finding which only covers a few areas of Nepal. In the same way, one of the content team members asked for more findings that cannot generalise things based on few findings. One cannot ignore similar kind of feedback for a long time. This means the research findings have feedback from same direction and asking similar questions, which compels the M&E team to address the issue. We have done this by introducing short questionnaire surveys (SQS) into our methodology, which allows us to ask controlled questions about these issues to a wider selection of community members. We can also feed questions generated by our qualitative research process into other large scale surveys.

Regular communication through mobile phones is one of the major activities conducted by M&E team members. There have been limited field visits and face-to-face meeting with the CRs. Therefore, team has been mentoring community researchers through mobile phone though this may be less effective. This is helping CRs to improve their research data. Sometimes research questions and SQS have been shared via email to community researchers, although it cannot be accessed by all community researchers. The M&E team has been analysing SMS polls, text messages, and letter responses, and triangulating these with the CRs research data to present more rigorous results to the program team members. Inconsistency in the number of responses and research data is one of the major problems which M&E team is facing to present results effectively.

Note that we can regard 'CRs' here as both community researchers and community reporters. The community reporters do a different job to the community researchers. However they have been part of our work for a long time and they fit into the flow of communication in a similar way.

It is important to be clear about exactly what communication is required to form a good working relationship between stakeholders involved in the PM&E process. Effective facilitation and meeting processes are also essential here. It is not sufficient that communication simply happens, but it must be the *right* type of communication to ensure that the PM&E work is conducted effectively. Your communications may often need to be:

- Documented
- Archived
- Searchable
- Sharable
- Accessible
- Delivered in a timely manner

Achieving these qualities in communication may depend on the development of new communication skills (e.g. database management, library archiving, report writing, etc.). Other important skills are facilitation and active listening. You may also need to take the particular circumstances of

stakeholders into account (e.g. any technology or infrastructure difficulties that they have to work under).

What Equal Access Nepal say:

The M&E team aims to present bi-monthly analysis reports regularly to content team members to get feedback from them on the data, although we have found that initially this was a hard thing to do. The M&E team is mentoring the CRs to work on the feedback (doing more probing research to find out missing information and get more in-depth data). The M&E team has been discussing the research questions and issues for research with the content team members and developing SQSs for our research. CRs are also encouraging listeners to write letters to content team members in respective research sites and are also promoting the radio programs, forming listeners groups, and encouraging dialogue at the community level. Here is a short description of this type of dialogue activity:

The value of community feedback forums: In January 2009 one of the M&E team and the local CRs held five community meetings in the Dadeldhura and Dang districts of Nepal to provide feedback on the research undertaken by the CRs and to discuss key findings from the research. These meetings had three main parts:

1. Asking the community what they knew about what the CRs are doing in the community.
2. Presentation of a report based on the data collected by the CRs.
3. Finding out what social change means to the community.

A key aim was to learn more about how much the CRs were able to involve community members in the research. The meetings were also seen as helping the CRs to be more accountable to the community in their research work. The meetings went well overall and had a number of useful and positive outcomes. At one meeting, the participants said they liked the change stories which the CR presented in his report because they helped them to learn about the change stories of other people. They asked him to present these stories to them regularly. Another meeting enabled parents and their children to meet together and discuss issues such as changes in discrimination between sons and daughters for the first time. However, it was difficult to get more parents to take part in the meetings. Various useful ideas about the process of social change in the community and the role of communication in social change were also identified in some meetings.

Communication and reporting capacities

We know already that communication skills are highly developed in your organisation – after all, communication is your work! But M&E, especially PM&E may involve new forms of communication with which you are less familiar.

The answers you've given above will already indicate many of the different types of communication – face-to-face, telecommunications and written – that you need to use as part of the M&E process. However, it would be a good idea to list them, clearly identify who will be tasked with producing each and summarize what the essential purpose of each may be.

In addition, it is a very good idea to identify the different audiences or recipients for these communications, because this will have a big influence on how communication is conducted. For example, you may have a lot of experience in writing M&E research reports for internal distribution and use by members of your own organisation; but can you also write reports and other publications (such as newsletters) that are accessible to community members or donor organisations? You could use a simple table in the following format to summarise this:

Type of communication	Who produces it	Intended audience	Purpose
E.g. Written report	E.G. M&E Manager	E.G. Donor	E.G. Annual progress report
Etc.			

Following on from this you should conduct an audit of the skills and resources available to the team. It is very likely that you already have most of what you need in place, but identifying possible needs well in advance is important. Discovering that you're missing something vital – for example knowledge of how to use some presentation software or even the software itself, may cause a big problem as a deadline looms. It's also important to remember that some communication needs might not immediately come to mind. For example, is a database used to archive your M&E data a form of communication? It certainly is! So you must ensure that everyone involved in using these types of complex communication tools either knows how to access and use them or knows whose job it is to provide this access.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

Our review of our current communication and reporting capacities looks like this:

Type of communication	Frequency	Who produces it	Intended audience	Purpose
Letters	Regularly	Listeners	Content team	Feedback and stories
SMS poll and text message	As planned in the project activities	Listeners	Content team	Feedback
Research data	Monthly	CRs	M&E team	Analysis report
Analysis report (research data)	Bi-monthly	M&E team	Program teams and donors	Feedback for program improvement and development and assess the impact of the radio program
Community feedback	Bi-monthly	CRs and M&E team	Community	Feedback and dialogue
Quarterly report	Every 3 months	M&E and program team	Donors	Progress update
Analysis report (letters, emails, SMS poll, text message)	Every 3 months	M&E team	Program team	Feedback for program improvement

				and development and assess the impact of the radio program
Evaluation reports	End of the project	M&E team	Donors	Overall progress and outcomes of the projects
Training needs assessment	Before the training	M&E team	Program team	Needs assessment
Training report and evaluation	As training takes place	M&E and program team	Program team	Assess needs and effectiveness of the training

Setting up the database for qualitative research data was a big challenge and triangulating it with the letter database was a problem. There were already set codes for the letter database and qualitative research data demanded of codes. Both of these coding processes have different methods that we found difficult to reconcile. After a long discussion on the database and coding system for research data, a separate database was created for CR data. Triangulation of this research data with the letter database is now in process and to date seven data analysis reports have been published as part of the AC4SC project.

Likewise managing the consistency in the number of and quality of research data which is sent by the CRs was a big challenge. Some researchers are managing this well, whilst others still lack in some areas. Appointing the first group of CRs was difficult, as we weren't sure what to mention in the selection criteria. As a consequence, some don't have enough qualifications to conduct qualitative research, although they received enough training and mentoring to enhance their capacity. Others lack some of the attitudes and values to do effective participatory research, so we should have considered this more carefully.

As part of a training workshop in April 2009, all of the CRs came to EAN's office in Kathmandu. During the workshop, the M&E team managed an interaction meeting with content team members, which the content team were also interested in. The meeting was fruitful because the CRs asked for content plans from both the SSMK and Naya Nepal teams which helped them to plan their research accordingly and be prepared before discussions with listeners in the community on the issues that the programs broadcast. They also asked about the irregular broadcast of radio programs in different areas and how to help people listen to the programs easily (some FMs stopped broadcasting and Radio Nepal has poor reach in some areas). Later this was addressed by the program team. Content team members provided them with a few research questions which they were very interested in. This interaction meeting helped both the content teams and CRs to understand each other's needs and values.

Another challenge was to give regular feedback to the community on the outcomes and process of research. To help community ownership in the process, regular bi-monthly feedback sessions were planned, but their conduct was irregular in some cases because of less effort by the CRs, who, to be

fair, probably didn't understand the concept of community feedback. We need to develop this part of the process more in order to ensure that there is more consistency in the cycle of communication among all researchers. This was planned to provide for community dialogue on the issues raised in the data collected by the CRs. This process would help each community to understand more about the issues covered in our programs, what their own solutions were to these, how a radio program can be responsible for social change, and how a radio program can help address their issues. This is a part of communication with the group of people that our programs are targeting, a process in which all levels of community people should be participating.

One particularly important element of communication involves training and workshop presentation and facilitation skills. Introducing new M&E processes may require extensive training, workshops and patient one-on-one explanations to provide the skills needed to other stakeholders. This training may, of course, be about communication itself! It is important to identify these training needs following your skills audit and identify who can provide this, either from within your organisation or as an external provider. You must identify training needs that occur regularly and what can be done as a special training event (albeit possibly with some follow-up work to reinforce learning after the main training session).

What Equal Access Nepal say:

The training needs of the M&E team were:

- Research planning
- Generating evaluation reports
- Analysis and triangulation of different information into an evaluation report
- Setting indicators
- Use of participatory tools and methods for qualitative data gathering and analysis.

We conducted the following trainings and workshops:

- Training for CRs to use different research tools and techniques to generate qualitative research data.
- Stakeholders' workshop to share knowledge.
- Training for M&E staff and content team members on the use of participatory research tools and techniques, facilitation, setting SMART indicators, coding and analysis.

Participation by the M&E team in these various trainings and workshops enabled them to write better evaluation reports, develop program objectives and SMART indicators and manage different data sources. Development of our first bi-annual research plan, research manuals for CRs, a review of M&E tools, techniques and activities were the outcomes of such trainings and workshops. The community researchers are more focused on research now and their research data is improving gradually. While conducting training for CRs, we received their comments, for example that they thought they needed more time for the training we provided. We understood that the CRs need more support while they use different tools and techniques. Ongoing mentoring and review visits are helping them to overcome such problems.

The Most Significant Change (MSC) Manual and the Community Researchers Manual that were developed have been guiding them a lot. A rigorous review of MSC stories has been completed to increase the quality of stories and demonstrate the value of MSC stories to EAN.

Time and M&E work routines

We have already explained that you must understand *who* needs your M&E outputs and identify exactly what they need to know. It is equally important that you identify *when* they need to know this. We have already said that communication (especially the outcomes of your PM&E work) must be delivered in a timely manner to be effective. This means that you must also consider the different timelines for the different communications used in PM&E and ensure that these fit into the other work schedules of your organisation. For example, it might be that the M&E team can only produce reports on their research findings on a monthly basis, but others in the organisation work to a much shorter schedule, perhaps needing to produce work outputs on a weekly basis. It will be impossible to devise a single schedule or work pattern that meets everyone's needs. But what you can do is to document these timelines, identify points where there might be potential problems, and then devise a schedule for M&E work that provides the best possible solution to these conflicting communication needs.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

After the M&E team started sharing data analysis reports with the program teams, they also started sharing their feedback for more probing on the issues raised by the research participants. For example, one piece of feedback related to why they think of SSMK as urban centric. Later research results showed that the use of English language and lack of local issues were of concern to listeners. Program team members wanted to know about how listeners want to listen to the radio program: individually or in groups, what medium listeners prefer - radio or TV, and what are the criticisms of listeners related to the radio program which were later explained by the research findings. Triangulation of research findings helped us to better understand the feedback for program improvement and development. Nowadays, program staff hold more discussions with M&E team members for all of the M&E activities planned in the program framework. Program team members think that these discussions are helping them to understand program intervention methods, build interpersonal relationships, improve the quality of the programs, and assess the impact of the radio programs. These discussions are also helping to assess the state of the projects and identify actions needed to complete the activities successfully.

One way to 'map out' these timelines visually is through a GANTT chart (see <http://www.rff.com/>) but it might be that simply using wall calendars or other shared diaries will be sufficient. The tools you use will vary depending on your evaluation of the complexities and challenges you face.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

This is how M&E fits into the program work of EAN:

Identification of issues: Content advisory group (CAG) meetings are regularly organised by EAN to decide the issues for radio programs. EAN invites some organisations which have similar kinds of

experience. These meetings help to decide issues to be raised in the radio program for the next two to three months. Our letters database and the community research data also helps to identify the issues. On a regular basis M&E team members are asked to participate these meeting, in which they provide their ideas related to the issues.

Broadcasting the program: After finalisation of the radio program, it goes on air through Radio Nepal and other FM station collaborators. The M&E team encourages the content team by providing feedback on regular broadcast monitoring.

Outreach activities: Outreach activities are conducted by regional outreach hubs and other NGO partners. The M&E team develops different tools for them to manage monitoring and evaluation work related to outreach activities. This is done in coordination with the program team members, and includes considering what needs to be assessed, what tools to develop, and how to use such tools.

Critical listening and feedback session (CLFS): For the past year, the M&E team have been conducting bi-monthly critical listening and feedback sessions at EAN. These sessions were developed by the M&E team. The idea of each session is to randomly choose any one episode of a broadcasted radio program and ask all the staff at EAN to listen critically and participate in the feedback session. This has encouraged program team members to see their radio programs critically and to improve accordingly. Content team members also share challenges and limitations while producing particular radio programs selected for the session.

Monitoring visits: The M&E team have been going on regular visits to monitor the program activities at a community level. They are also visiting research sites to monitor research activities and to mentor the CRs. They have been sharing these findings in program meetings to update their colleagues on the progress of different projects works.

Evaluation works and reports: Different sources of information like the letters database, research data, field visit reports based on focus group discussions and key informant interviews are triangulated by the M&E team in order to produce evaluation reports. These evaluation reports are also shared with program team members to discuss these findings. After getting some feedback from the program team members, detailed preliminary versions of evaluation reports are sent to the donors. Some key findings that are required for the donor's reports are also extracted from AC4SC data reports.

Feedback for the final report: Donors send their feedback on the final report. These findings are helpful to develop new funding proposals.

Let's imagine a project for one year with only nine months of radio program production. This is how the M&E team plans the project's activities in a Gantt chart at EAN.

S/N	Activities	Months											
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1.	Identification of issues	Blue			Blue			Blue			Blue		
2.	Broadcasting the program		Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red		
3.	Outreach activities		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green			
4.	CLFS				Yellow			Yellow		Yellow			
5.	Monitoring visits			Cyan		Cyan		Cyan		Cyan			
6.	Evaluation research				Purple			Purple			Purple		
7.	Preparation of final reports										Brown	Brown	
8.	Feedback and completion of final report												Orange

It is important to make a clear distinction between:

- Communication events that occur on a regular basis,
- Things that need to be done routinely by the M&E team, but only done when the need arises, and
- Special events that need to fit into the wider pattern of the M&E work.

At this point you should look again at your previous map of communication activities and relationships in order to try to identify what time characteristics they have. For example:

- The M&E team might regularly produce a monthly report on recent research findings for circulation and discussion amongst everyone in the organisation.
- Field staff might email or telephone CRs or reporters to pass on new research questions or ideas for improving data collection shortly after receiving fieldwork reports.
- A special training session might require materials on M&E work.

Some things might combine the above characteristics. For example:

- A report to a donor organisation might be done on a regular annual basis, but this cycle is sufficiently long to make preparation of such a report a special task for the M&E team.

Sharing information about different stakeholders' work schedules and timelines presents a communication and coordination challenge in its own right. This information needs to be discussed, shared, and, if necessary, revised by everyone who has a stake in the outcomes of the PM&E process. This is important because failure to appreciate the different time pressures that people work under and how the failure to provide timely communication about key PM&E findings may be a significant cause of tension within the organisation as a whole.

What Equal Access Nepal say:

There was a question about whether community reporters will also work as researchers or whether new CRs will be hired when we expand the network to add eight new CRs. Our recent review of the AC4SC project indicated that there were some resource advantages in favour of the first solution. But we decided that we would hire new CRs and later the M&E process can also use them for other

projects. Nowadays, program staff visiting field sites get regular assistance from the CRs. They are working as EAN's 'identity' in the communities and encouraging people to discuss different issues raised by our programs.

Although it took quite a lot of time to develop our first bi-annual (six monthly) research plan, continuous involvement of program team members to develop the plan helped them to understand the process and why we are actually doing this research on our radio programs. Besides research data findings, the M&E team has been able to conduct short questionnaire surveys and present the analysis of these surveys to program teams to help them understand to what extent their radio programs are successful in achieving project objectives.

Data analysis and reporting cycles

The previous section looked at timely M&E communication in terms of different stakeholder and organisation needs. In this section we look at another factor that has a big impact on communication timing, which is the process of participatory and qualitative research itself.

Survey techniques used in most quantitative M&E research tend to be used at clear points in time. A survey or questionnaire is devised, administered and then the results are analysed prior to reporting. Even if multiple surveys are used, this tends to be done in order to achieve comparable data from different points in time, such as is the case with a classic baseline to endline survey strategy. There is usually no expectation that the survey questions would change and this may in fact be counterproductive if the research requires production of statistically valid data.

Qualitative research on the other hand often requires what is called an *iterative* research strategy or a process of constant comparison. What this means is that data is analysed as it is collected or at least shortly after collection, and what is learned from this analysis feeds back into an ongoing process of formulating further research questions. The process is exploratory and inductive in character (i.e. it involves drawing general conclusions from the evidence gathered).

This process of qualitative data collection and analysis is discussed in more detail in **Module 5**. In this module we only want to emphasize that participatory and qualitative research has this iterative characteristic, which means that conducting such research presents particular communication challenges for the M&E team. Unlike the communications described above, these mainly involve communication within the M&E team itself. Even if only one person is tasked with conducting qualitative M&E research, they must still need to be aware of the significant time commitment that producing iterative analysis will impose upon them.

The key point to remember here is that this is an ongoing commitment and such participatory, qualitative M&E work cannot simply be done at isolated points in time. This needs to be realistically reflected in whatever weekly or daily schedule is devised by the M&E team for their work. It is hard to catch up on a backlog of data collation and analysis if this becomes a problem.

It would be useful at this point to consider the following questions:

- Has routine time for discussion about and analysis of qualitative data such as MSC stories and notes from FGDs been built into the work schedules of the M&E team members and other key members of the organisation?
- Is there a clear understanding amongst the various members of the organisation of the need for these analytical discussions about interpretation of data?
- Does everyone have a clear understanding of how and why qualitative data is used within the M&E processes of the organisation and how it can be triangulated with other types of data to make your findings stronger and more trustworthy? (see **Module 5** for more information about this)
- What happens if there is any confusion or conflict around the timing of different activities and is there a clear mechanism for either reorganizing activities or assigning precedence to activities?

What Equal Access Nepal say:

Regular communication about the findings with the program team members is essential to encourage members of an organisation to value the whole M&E process. One component cannot go alone for long. Like other elements of our work, M&E is one of the key components in an organisation which bridges communication gaps within and between our programs. It also bridges the gaps between the organisation and the community and other stakeholders, and between the organisation and donors. M&E work always involves asking for evidence which needs systematic management and rigorous analysis of data sources. Our program team gave lots of feedback on research data analysis reports and other ongoing M&E reports for other projects. The M&E team tried their best to address them with evidence, which is one of the reasons we now have better coordination between the program and M&E teams. One of the most challenging things is to present the findings and feedback in a way that is interesting and engaging for the program team members to read. We have been developing our capacity to present what our various audiences want. A lot of discussion is going on among M&E team members on this issue.

One of our major challenges is the lack of any culture of sharing between organisations that are working in the field of communication for development in Nepal. There was no such evidence of EAN's M&E team's participation in sharing meetings on M&E activities with other communication for development related organisations. EAN has organised such meetings with its stakeholders and to some extent this problem has been minimised by the M&E team participating in CAG meetings and sharing information there. One of the good outputs of the involvement of M&E in the CAGs is the recognition of M&E's input for content development and sharing the other outputs with the participants as well. This has helped to increase the status of the M&E team at EAN.

Another challenge is when community members ask you what they get from taking part in the research. The CRs are facing this problem. While conducting bi-monthly feedback sessions with the community, people say that development is about providing some material to the people like building, roads, classrooms, and cattle. We try our best to convince them that the issues they are facing will be reflected in the radio programs. In some research sites, group listening and discussion is regularly being held by community people, especially young people. They are also providing regular feedback to program members through letters and participating in research activities.

A further major challenge is sustaining the communication system at EAN. Turnover of staff members in key positions and limited funding to run projects for years are the major two reasons which hinders effective communication. Therefore, to overcome this problem, good communication, feedback and capacity development systems need to be established in the organisation which need to be understood and followed by new team members in the organisation.

Frequently encountered problems in communication and possible prevention strategies

It is important to remember that communication is a thoroughly human process, so problems inevitably occur! Therefore, an essential part of the communication process is on-going self-evaluation to identify if problems are occurring, to identify at what point in the communication process this is happening, and to initiate problem solving strategies if needed.

You may need to reassess your answers to the above questions periodically as part of this problem solving strategy, especially if new projects have started or personnel have changed. In addition:

- Does everyone understand their responsibilities within the M&E process (i.e. what they need to do to support ‘clients/stakeholders’ within the organisation, as well as how this helps you to communicate effectively with communities and donors?)
- What happens if a communication output isn’t delivered or some other part of the communication process breaks down (i.e. is there any contingency in place to make up for a temporary or permanent loss of information, especially if this is required for a vital purpose?)
- Can people find the information they need in a timely fashion given their communication needs (for example, to contribute to a donor report by the given deadline or to contribute to a content advice meeting)?
- Are all outputs regularly evaluated for quality and what criteria are used to make this assessment given the different communication forms and content involved? Whose responsibility is it to do this?
- Is there a system of training or mentoring in place to help people effectively fulfil their various roles within the communication process?
- Is there a way to evaluate or measure the impacts of the M&E process— especially any contributions made by qualitative research, in order to make improvements if the benefits to the organisation (for example, improvements in program content, community impact, or donor support) do not appear to be appropriate to the cost of supporting the research?

Finally, here are some words of encouragement and tips from the people at EAN!

Effective communication is essential to the success of participatory M&E in an organisation. Effective communication between M&E team members and program team members increases the impact of program development on addressing people's needs. At EAN, PM&E involves the M&E team, program teams, community people and other stakeholders. Better communication and coordination is needed between them for successful and sustainable project outcomes. It needs the participation of all stakeholders in all aspects of program development, like needs assessment, program

implementation and impact assessment. Our M&E team has developed a culture of regular discussion among team members to provide feedback to our internal clients (program team members) and external clients (community, stakeholders and donors). Regular critical reviews of how well our M&E systems and the CR Network are working are needed to work effectively. EAN is now including an M&E component and cost in each funding proposal and strong M&E is one of the big assets of EAN at the moment.
