Module 6: Getting started and planning for PM&E and impact assessment

Outcomes from using this module

You will understand:
• The key steps to effectively developing and implementing a PM&E plan
• How to plan in terms of time, people and resources
• How to deal with power, gender, literacy and sensitive issues
• The ethical issues you need to consider when doing PM&E

Introduction

This module aims to help you get started with developing a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) and impact assessment framework that will result in a practical, well thought out plan. It explains how to do research and evaluation based on ethical principles and an awareness of key issues such as power, gender and literacy.

Each time your organisation develops a PM&E plan you need to ask a series of questions:

• Why are we undertaking this evaluation?
• What information are we seeking?
• What methods are best suited to each PM&E activity?
• Where will we carry out these activities?
• What resources will we need?
• How will we analyse the data?
• How will we use the results?
• How will we share the results with others?

Asking these questions will ensure your PM&E activities have a focus and achieve their anticipated goals. It encourages you to plan based on why you are doing PM&E, how you will do it, and what you will do with the findings.

Once you have asked yourself these questions, you can develop your plan. The selection of methods and participants is just one part of the PM&E planning process, which also includes developing a theory of change, setting objectives and indicators and developing a communication and reporting strategy.

Your plan will specify what methods you will use, what questions you will ask, who you will ask, and when. Once you start to implement the plan, you may decide you want to add some questions, or methods, or groups of people to involve. This is fine, you can adjust your plan as you go – but you
must have a plan to start with, to ensure you are able to make the work meaningful for your organisation.

As with all of the processes outlined in this toolkit, you are encouraged to actively involve your key stakeholders in each stage of the development and implementation of your PM&E plan.

**Steps to developing a participatory M&E and impact assessment framework**

The process of developing your PM&E plan should be seen as flexible, open to change and revision, and based on ongoing learning from regular reviews. Some steps may happen in a different order to that presented below. It depends on many things, such as the reporting requirements of donors. We have identified 14 steps to developing a PM&E and impact assessment framework:

**Step 1: Identify stakeholders**
**Step 2: Develop a theory of change**
**Step 3: Clarify expectations and outcomes from the evaluation**
**Step 4: Clarify the boundaries and scope of the impact assessment**
**Step 5: Identify objectives and indicators**
**Step 6: Identify key questions**
**Step 7: Develop monitoring and evaluation tables**
**Step 8: Decide which methodologies and methods to use**
**Step 9: Consider the resources and support available**
**Step 10: Develop your communication and reporting strategy**
**Step 11: Develop your PM&E training plan**
**Step 12: Develop your implementation strategy**
**Step 13: Develop your learning and improvement strategy**
**Step 14: Develop your critical review strategy**

It may be useful to begin with the basic, essential steps (marked by an asterisk above). You can later add more of the steps as you better understand the process and the strengths and limitations of the various methodologies and methods.

These steps are based on the principles of the Communication for Social Change approach to communication for development and the principles of PM&E, which were set out in the Introduction to this toolkit. They emphasise taking a participatory approach to the planning process, and encourage you to include as many different staff and stakeholders in your M&E work as possible.

**Step 1: Identify stakeholders**

This step involves identifying key stakeholders and staff members who you want to participate in your PM&E planning and capacity development activities. These are the people who are important to achieving the changes or outcomes that are sought from your programs.

They could include:
- Representatives of your outreach partners and other relevant organisations in the community
- Content Advisory Groups
- Local community reporters
- Community researchers
- Organisational staff (M&E, content production and outreach staff)
- Donors and other supporters

This process includes:

- Holding a meeting with staff to come up with an initial list of stakeholders
- Identifying ways that each of the groups and individuals could be involved in the process and what sort of time they are prepared to commit to the process
- Considering the ways that they can be involved.

**Modules 1 and 2** show examples of different ways of identifying stakeholders. **Module 2: Setting objectives and indicators** includes an example of how Equal Access Nepal identified various stakeholders and the ways they wanted to involve them. A key aim should be to make the process as manageable and effective as possible. You might identify the ‘champions’ who would be vital to the success of the PM&E process. You can decide on the best number and type of stakeholders to participate in the core planning process in order to make it as effective and streamlined as possible, while allowing some flexibility in the process. You could also use various stakeholder analysis methods and the analysis of your organisational networks. (see **Useful resources, information and tools** section).

**Step 2: Develop a theory of change**

This step assumes that your program or project does not yet have a clear theory of change or program logic that can be used in the impact assessment process. Ideally this step should be taken before a program is actually implemented but a retrospective theory of change can be developed.

Developing a theory of change is an important step in impact assessment and project development. We recommend using the Theory of Change (TOC) approach as it fits well with the PM&E framework and the principles which this toolkit is based on. You might already be using a Logical Framework (logframe) approach, and if that works well for you, you can simply try to incorporate some of the more participatory aspects of a TOC.

Whichever approach you use, it is important to see your model of change as dynamic and flexible and open to regular revision:

*What changes are you trying to bring about?*
Example of the development of a Theory of Change

The following describes the process we used at EAN to begin developing a Theory of Change (TOC) for the SSMK and Naya Nepal programs. It was adapted from the TOC process developed by Keystone (see Useful resources section). The aim was that this process would help to develop a shared understanding of the kind of change that the radio programs want to achieve and to identify a shared vision of what success would look like. Once this was agreed, the pathways to achieve this vision of success could be thought through.

We envisaged that this process would allow the programs to develop indicators of success (or impact) in ways that would allow EAN to demonstrate or prove impact (or success) as well as to improve (through careful consideration, reflection and research) how it is working towards that vision of success. We expected that this would help the programs to be clearer about what they are trying to achieve, and to help the M&E network to support them in moving towards this. We also thought the process would be useful in helping to define objectives and set the kinds of indicators that would be useful in M&E activities.

A one day workshop was held with management, SSMK and Naya Nepal program production staff and the M&E team. It was facilitated by one of the M&E team and one of the AC4SC research team. The TOC process was presented to participants as a road map. We explained that the process will include identifying all of the stakeholders who can help, or play a role. It will set out what needs to happen along the way. It would allow them to work out how to measure success, and assess their role in social change. Other stakeholders would also need to take part in the process of developing the TOCs. We emphasised that the radio programs were only one part of what will make the vision of success happen. Once the TOC was completed, it needed to be regularly revisited, since it should be seen as dynamic, not static.

We worked through two main steps in the TOC process.

**Step 1: Vision of success**
To develop a vision of success we first did the ‘epitaph’ exercise. This is a way to express how a program would like to be remembered:

The **SSMK epitaph** was: A “voice” which grew as a “youth culture” that helped young people of Nepal to believe in what they were capable of by challenging the boundary of traditional society.

The **Naya Nepal epitaph** was: Naya Nepal created a forum for dialogue for sustainable peace in Nepal, helping people to participate in political change, be aware, and empowered.

Given how they would like to be remembered, the groups next worked on creating a vision of success. What will they leave behind - what does it look like? The **vision of success for SSMK** was: Youth are aware and empowered through ‘life skills’ and have created different mediums of sharing ideas and views in society; creating an atmosphere where youths are free to speak their minds and act for the change they believe in.

The **vision of success for Naya Nepal** was: Responsible and well-informed citizens working together with different groups/organisations and government bodies towards sustainable peace and institutionalisation of democracy.

**Step 2: Pathways to success**
Once the shared vision of success had been imagined, we started to work on planning for that success. This involved thinking about what the pathways to success would be. Who would be involved? What conditions would need to be in place for this success to happen? We made some progress towards building the TOCs for each program, but they were not completed.

More meetings were later held with the SSMK and Naya Nepal teams to add more details to the TOC maps that were developed and to refine the vision of success. The maps we later developed are shown in the Appendix to this module.
Your program will change over time as you make revisions based on the PM&E process or you receive funding for the development and implementation of new program themes.

**Benefits and challenges in using the Theory of Change approach**

The following feedback was given on the EAN workshop to develop a Theory of Change for the SSMK and NN programs:

Some program makers found this workshop productive for identifying the vision of success and stakeholders, while others didn't find the process very productive. Some of the SSMK and NN content team were concerned that the outcomes of the process could be unproductive because they couldn't use the tool practically (‘practically’ in the sense that EAN cannot control or address all the conditions related to other stakeholders to achieve the vision of success). The content teams felt that the TOC was slightly abstract since they were talking about things that they have very little direct control over.

The M&E team thought it would be difficult to involve all the different stakeholders in the process and to influence them. The process was also seen as time-consuming to fully complete. However, workshop participants thought the epitaph, vision and initial mapping stage were useful. The M&E team thought the process could potentially be used to help them to develop logframes in project proposals. Participants also thought the process was a good way of bringing the M&E and content teams together to think through the social change process, and how the radio programs contributed to that change, in a holistic way.

You will need to ask yourself the same question at regular intervals, so that your work is always relevant and up to date. *What changes are you trying to bring about NOW?*

PM&E methodologies such as the Most Significant Change technique and participatory techniques such as Roadblocks and Problem Trees can help you to understand what ‘success’ or ‘change’ means at the local level.

An example of the TOC approach developed by Keystone Accountability is shown in the box above. It is designed to help you to ask:

- What are the local factors and relationships that are important to our work?
- What pathways are there to bring about the change we want?
- How can we track changes?
- Who are the stakeholders in the process?

A theory of change provides a picture of how your program works (in theory) and reveals the assumptions underlying your program. This may not be based on what actually happens in the community. It can help you to create a bigger and clearer picture of the process of change. This process of developing a TOC is very useful since it requires your stakeholders and staff to work together to clarify their long-term vision for the outcomes of a program and what needs to happen and who needs to do what to make it successful.
Step 3: Clarify expectations and outcomes from the evaluation

It is important to clarify what your key stakeholders (including funders) expect from the PM&E and impact assessment process and what sort of information they need. Findings must be useful to you and your stakeholders and other interested groups (such as listener club members). Use findings to improve your programs and to improve your understanding of social and behaviour change and the role of your programs in bringing about change, whether directly or indirectly, and whether changes are positive or negative, expected or unexpected.

Example of clarifying expectations of evaluation with EAN stakeholders

EAN has both internal and external stakeholders who expect different things from the evaluation of the programs we produce. Donors, content team members and listeners at the community level are our major stakeholders in an evaluation. Donors always expect you to identify the impact of radio programs and to complete project activities, including evaluations, on time. They are more interested in behavior change which is shown through stories, presentations, descriptions, and quotes from listeners. They are interested in both qualitative and quantitative results. The content teams want you to present evidence of the impact of radio programs, gather feedback for program improvement, and identify new emerging issues. Lastly, listeners want the evaluation to identify the issues and information that they are interested in and want to hear on our radio programs. They also provide regular feedback that helps us to improve our programs, and stories and other information about change impacts.

During the development of the six month research plan, a question asked to both Naya Nepal and SSMK content team members was:

What are the key things that you need to find out about audiences/programs in the next six months?

Based on this question, the M&E team met with both groups to list the research questions. The NN team came up with sixteen research questions on security issues, and twelve research questions on justice issues, which they would like to know more about.

The SSMK team came up with twelve general research questions related to the ongoing issues their program covers, ten research questions on sport, sixteen on disability, five on Early Childhood Development, and sixteen on nutrition.

Again, the M&E team met with each program team in order to prioritise the major questions (limiting repetition), for the first six month research plan.

Nine research questions for NN and eleven research questions for SSMK were agreed upon. These research questions focused on understanding program listenership, information on activities conducted by listeners at the community level, how well liked different segments of the radio programs are, ideas for program improvement, the popularity of the programs, the issues listeners would like the programs to cover, and the impact of the radio programs in general.

This step includes asking:

- Who is the evaluation for?
- What is it for?
- What expectations do various stakeholder groups have for the evaluation?
- What information do they need?
- Why do they need this information?
- Who are the intended users of the evaluation?
- How will the findings be used by different stakeholders?
- How will the process itself empower those involved and strengthen communication for social change processes?

**Step 4: Clarifying the boundaries and scope of the impact assessment**

Be clear about what you are trying to find out. Link your PM&E to your program objectives and your TOC or program logic. Which aspects of your work are you evaluating?

You should aim to capture expected, unexpected, positive and negative impacts. To capture unexpected impacts it is important not to limit your questions to ‘Have we achieved our objectives?’ but rather, ‘What has changed in people’s lives?’ It is also necessary to consider who the impact may be on and what level the impact assessment will focus on: individuals, households, particular groups such as listener clubs, community organisations or whole communities.

Be clear about the geographic and time boundaries of your evaluation so that everyone is clear about the limits to the areas in which impacts have happened and the time period that is being assessed. Be realistic about what types of impact can be expected within certain timeframes.

Key questions to ask in relation to the scale and scope of the evaluation and obtaining the most trustworthy and meaningful results are:

- How many participants or respondents are needed?
- Which particular groups of people need to be involved? (i.e. female and males, people from different caste or ethnic groups, older and younger people etc.)
- How many communities or sites need to be involved in the evaluation?
- How can we best select those sites?

**Step 5: Identifying objectives and indicators**

It is essential to clarify and agree on your program objectives before you begin the process of indicator setting. You also need to decide which particular program objectives your evaluation and impact assessment will be focused on in a given period of time (for example, as part of a six month M&E plan). Otherwise you might spend a lot of time collecting data that is not useful.

As we explain in more detail in Module 2: Setting objectives and indicators, there are different ways of setting indicators. Where possible, indicators should be developed through participation and dialogue so that they are locally meaningful. This process can highlight the different information needs and ideas of change that different stakeholders have. Creative approaches to indicator setting such as those using pictures or stories can be particularly useful when working with community groups that include people with low levels of literacy.
It is more useful to develop a small number of meaningful indicators which can be reviewed regularly and carefully than a long list of indicators which is too time-consuming to use effectively.

You should be aware that indicators are good ways of measuring change but not of capturing the reasons behind social change. For this reason, you may want to consider sometimes using alternatives to indicators, such as Most Significant Change stories or ‘verifying assumptions’, which can be more useful in assessing the impacts of your programs.

**Step 6: Identifying key questions**

*What do you want to know?*

*Which questions do you need answered?*

Do not have too many questions at any one time, and to try to answer these questions thoroughly. This process could involve making a list of the key information that various stakeholders need and holding a workshop to decide which of these questions are the most important to focus on in the initial phase of the PM&E.

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**Example of the process of selecting research questions**

The following process was used at EAN to identify broad and focused research questions for SSMK, to be answered during a six month period from April to September 2010. They were developed as part of the process of developing a six month M&E plan.

We began by identifying the broad, ongoing objectives of the program and the more specific objectives which were related to program themes that were to be broadcast such as disability and sexual and reproductive health rights. Next we identified indicators for each of these objectives. After this step we worked out research questions that related to these objectives and indicators. We also identified the various methods that could best be used to collect information on these questions and other details such as the target number of participants or survey respondents. Once the draft plan was developed we shared this with the SSMK content team and made revisions based on their feedback and new developments in the program content.

The **broad/ongoing research questions** we identified included:

1. To what extent did SSMK listeners, in the past 6 months, take part in or organise one or more activities such as collective action and individual participation in social debates?
2. To what extent can SSMK listeners give examples of using skills and knowledge to make informed decisions at personal, family and community level about any SSMK issues?
3. To what extent can SSMK listeners give examples of being involved in decision making at family and/or community levels?
4. What type of improvements do listeners think would make SSMK a better program?

The **focused research questions** we identified included:

1. To what extent are changes observed in attitude and behaviour amongst differently-abled young people and young people around disability issues?
2. To what extent do you think that the SSMK program has paved the way for open discussion on sexual and reproductive health rights issues?
3. To what extent do you think the SSMK program has helped spread the message of hope among youth in the present transitional period?
Step 7: Developing monitoring and evaluation tables

Based on the information gathered in the steps above, the next step is to develop tables that allow you to capture your monitoring and evaluation goals, indicators, research questions, source of information etc. in an easy to understand format. An example of a monitoring plan and an evaluation plan in table format are shown Appendix 1 and 2 in this module. The idea here is that there is a clear separation between monitoring and evaluation activities and that monitoring data feeds into the evaluation. As we noted in the introduction to this toolkit, if monitoring systems are working well, evaluation of programs is needed less often and is much easier to carry out.

This step includes identifying existing information that your organisation or other organisations hold which could provide answers to the key questions you have developed. You should always try to gather some contextual information that can help you to better understand the communities you are researching and any barriers to social change. From this process you can assess what new information you need to gather.

Step 8: Decide which methodologies and methods to use

A number of questions need to be asked when selecting the most appropriate methodologies and methods to use in your PM&E:

- What methods and methodologies can help you answer your questions?
- How well do they engage our primary stakeholders?
- What mix of methodologies and methods will you use?

Key questions here are:

- Will the particular methodologies and methods provide the type of information you want, when you want it?
- Will they help you answer our particular questions?

To ensure the methods and methodologies you have selected are appropriate, ask yourself the following questions...

Do the methodologies and methods selected:

- Help you actively and meaningfully include a range of stakeholders?
- Provide an opportunity to strengthen PM&E capacities?
- Help you understand the wider social, cultural and communication context and its effect on the program?
- Help you understand how and why social change happens?
- Help you look at the issues of concern from multiple perspectives?

Engaging stakeholders

How well will the methodologies and methods you choose engage your stakeholders?
Ask yourself:

- Are our stakeholders engaged with and interested in these methodologies and methods (including program staff and listeners)?
- Which methodologies and methods have you used before, and how well did they work?
- Which methodologies and methods will work best for the particular groups involved? (i.e. taking into account issues such as the local culture, gender, age, literacy and education levels)

Mix of methodologies and methods to suit your PM&E needs

Which particular mix of methodologies and methods will best fit the evaluation outcomes that you are looking for? You need to be clear about why you have chosen each methodology and method and understand their strengths and limitations or constraints.

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**Example of selecting methods**

The methods chosen depend on the resources available to you and your stakeholders. After we developed the six month research plan, we (the M&E team at EAN) decided it was important to have regular meetings with the program teams, which include content team members, so that we could decide together which research questions to select for each two month cycle of our six month research plan.

For this process, the M&E team share all of the research questions that we want to cover in the six months, and we discuss them with the program teams. Collaboratively, questions are prioritised for the coming two month research cycle. For the last cycle, following the prioritising of questions, the following methods were chosen to address them:

- Short questionnaire surveys (SQS)
- Group discussions (focus groups)
- Individual interviews
- MSC stories
- Participatory techniques (including Diamond, Gender chart and Chapatti)

The participatory techniques were chosen in part as a way to quickly verify findings generated by the other methods. We recognise that any one particular method cannot provide enough data to produce rigorous findings. Different methods are chosen to triangulate data, and enrich findings.

Different methods are used for different purposes: SQS was chosen to provide some qualitative and quantitative information related to program listenership, program impact and improvements; focus groups were chosen to generate critical reviews of the programs and the issues they raise; individual interviews provide a different type of more personal data on these issues; and MSC is about collecting stories of impact, or change. Participatory techniques were also used to get in-depth data on issues, and also to rank different segments of the radio programs, to find out which are the most popular, and why. These methods help to build rapport with community members, and quickly gain a general understanding of a local area, local people, local issues and the impact of our radio programs.

The methods chosen involve local people in defining their own issues, and sharing stories about the impact or change brought about by the programs. This mix of methods provides richer data, but there are also limitations, in that they require a well trained person to facilitate the discussions, collect and report the data. It also takes up time for participants, which may not always be convenient.

Developing our use of mixed methods has helped us to generate more in depth data and rich findings. The overall process has helped to generate dialogue across EAN, between program teams and M&E staff, and establish a healthy communication environment. Maintaining consistency of quality and amount of data remains a challenge for generating our data analysis reports. It is a time consuming process.
Consider limitations or constraints and whether these are outweighed by the strengths of the methodology or method. Ask yourself how well different methodologies and methods balance or complement each other. The Useful resources, information and tools section of this toolkit lists publications that provide this information.

If you find that some methodologies or methods are not as useful as you had thought they would be, or do not help you answer the questions you have, change them. A good PM&E design needs to be flexible, and should enable you to explore interesting things as they emerge.

Step 9: Consider the resources and support available

A crucial stage of the planning process involves thinking through the different resources and support that you will need.

Key questions you need to ask are:

- **TIME:** How long will it take to complete each part of the PM&E plan?
- **PEOPLE:** Who needs to be involved in each part of the PM&E plan, and how will you encourage their participation?
- **RESOURCES:** How much will it cost in money and other resources to complete each part of this plan?

**Time**

In your plan, think about how you will collect your data. For example, will you be conducting interviews, administering short surveys or using participatory techniques? No matter what methods you use, you need to consider the amount of time each requires.

Each method is different and therefore you should consider this when planning how many interviews, surveys or participatory techniques you want to use, and consider how much time you have available. When creating your PM&E plan it is important that you not only think about the time it will take to collect the data but also remember to think about how long it will take to document, transcribe, code and analyse this data.

The process of data collection, analysis and writing up usually takes longer than we think it will. Therefore it is important to be realistic in your planning and to allow plenty of time to carry out each of your tasks. Careful attention to detail during the planning stage will ensure you don’t put yourself under undue pressure!!

The complexity and quality of the data you need to gather affects the time needed for data collection and analysis. Participatory and qualitative methods often require more time than for quantitative methods. However, when we look at this from a long-term perspective that considers the many benefits of taking a participatory approach, this time and other costs involved can be easily justified.

Key questions to consider here include:
• How much time do you have to conduct the evaluation?
• How much time do you need to prepare?
• How much time will be needed to gather and record the data?
• How much time will be needed to analyse and prepare reports?

People

Participatory, qualitative research relies on good communication with those who work in your organisation and local communities. How many people do you have access to that would be happy to help with your research and evaluation tasks?

Developing a strong evaluation culture within your organisation and the communities you serve may mean that you train others to assist you in some of your research and evaluation tasks. If people know you are prepared to listen to them, and try to understand their issues, it may mean that people will turn their everyday skills and knowledge into research data for you by keeping field notes or diaries. A range of people can be engaged in the PM&E process. The more local support you have the easier it will be for you to conduct your research.

You might greatly benefit by strengthening the capacities of staff, community researchers and others to undertake the research and evaluation.

Key questions to consider include:

• What skills, knowledge and experience in particular methods do the staff and others who will take part in the PM&E process have?
• What sort of training might be required in particular methods to increase the quality of the process, the data collected, and the analysis and reporting of that data?

Organisational support

The support of management and program staff in conducting the evaluation is also very important to success, especially if you want to use unfamiliar M&E methodologies and methods. Key questions here include:

• How open is your organisation to the use of ‘alternative’ or unfamiliar approaches to M&E?
• If it is not very open to alternative approaches, what strategies could be used to help foster greater support?
• What level of technical and other support can your organisation provide that could help your team to more effectively conduct the evaluation?

Resources: Budget and costs

What are the cost implications of your PM&E plan?

Always ask the question ‘how much will it cost?’ when planning the different stages of your evaluation. The costs associated with your evaluation may include travel expenses, administrative
costs, and the cost of equipment that is necessary for your research. It might also include expenses or wages to pay for community researchers.

One way to avoid the anxiety of financial stress in evaluation is to keep it simple. Try to be simple but realistic in terms of the planning and the carrying out of the research. If there is a support organisation involved, be sure to work out what support they can offer at the start of the project and then map the PM&E goals around that.

If you are realistic your plan is more likely to be successful. There could be costs involved in such things as travel and this may have a significant impact on whom you can visit and research, where you can conduct your research. If you need to travel to far away or remote communities, you will need to think through the cost of this, and consider the need for this in terms of the evaluation.

**Scale and scope of the evaluation**

The various factors outlined above will determine the scale and scope of the evaluation and what those involved in the process can realistically and practically deal with. The evaluation should be proportionate to the scale of the program.

Ask yourself these key questions:

- How many participants are needed?
- Which groups of people need to be involved?
- How many communities or sites need to be involved to provide meaningful and useful findings?

**Step 10: Develop your communication and reporting strategy**

Effective communication is absolutely essential to the success of PM&E, as we noted in Module 1: Effective communication, feedback and reporting systems in a PM&E process. It is important to find ways of communicating your PM&E results in effective, appropriate and timely ways in order to meet different stakeholder and organisational needs.

There are many questions to consider here such as:

- Are there any communication barriers that may be affecting our PM&E process?
- Can we improve communication flows and connections between the M&E team and various stakeholder groups?
- What is the best way to communicate our PM&E findings and recommendations to different stakeholders?
- Are you able to communicate findings to different stakeholders?

Going through the various exercises, tips and examples in Module 1 will help you to answer these questions.
Step 11: Develop your PM&E training plan

Some ongoing training of staff and community-based researchers will be needed if you are using new or unfamiliar methods and techniques. This needs to be part of your planning process. Ask yourself these questions:

- What level of skills, knowledge and experience in the methodologies and methods we have selected do those who will conduct the research have?
- Where are the gaps in their skills, knowledge and experience that need to be filled?
- What level should our training be aimed at? (i.e. beginner level or more advanced level)
- What sort of ongoing mentoring or support will we need to give community researchers?
- How can we best provide this support?

An example of the assessment of training needs of EAN staff is provided in Module 1.

You also need to think about how you can maintain research and evaluation capacity with your organisation. Involving a wide range of staff in your training and PM&E capacity development activities is a good strategy that can help to reduce the impact of regular staff turnover and encourage staff to see evaluation as part of the overall, day to day activity of your organisation that everyone can take part in, not just the M&E staff.

Step 12: Develop your implementation strategy

Now that you have developed your PM&E framework, you can prepare a plan for implementing the key steps in this framework, over an appropriate timeframe. It is a good idea to develop a Gantt chart (or something similar) that shows all the key tasks down the left hand side and the time frame along the top of the page. The time taken for each activity is shown by a line on the chart. It is important that your monitoring and evaluation activities are well integrated with each other and using such a chart can help you to do this. You can find an example of a Gantt chart of an implementation plan for a six month PM&E plan in Appendix 4 of this module.

The training and support needs of staff and others involved in your PM&E process should be assessed before your plan is implemented. The aim should be to ensure that good quality data is gathered and that you have processes in place to deal with any problems with low data quality and to continually develop participatory research and data collection, analysis and reporting capacities.

Step 13: Develop your learning and improvement strategy

Evaluation is a constant learning and program improvement process. The outcomes of your PM&E activities can regularly inform the development of new knowledge about your program, your listeners and their communities and the most effective way to influence social and behaviour change in those communities.

A learning and improvement strategy could include:
• Holding bi-monthly Critical Listening and Feedback Sessions (see Module 4)
• Preparing quarterly reports that identify key findings from your PM&E work and suggest ways that programs could be improved or refined.
• Holding quarterly staff and stakeholder meetings to discuss the contents of your quarterly reports and how programs can be improved or refined.
• Holding annual stakeholder meetings to share your learnings and identify other strategies and ideas for improving your program and your PM&E processes.

**Step 14: Develop your critical review strategy**

An effective PM&E or EAR process includes ongoing critical reviews of the effectiveness of these processes and the capacity development strategies used by your organization. The aim here is to encourage continuous critical reflection on your research, monitoring and evaluation processes and how they can be done more effectively and appropriately to meet the aims of gathering good quality evidence and stakeholder empowerment, participation and inclusion.

### Example of a critical review process

Regular reviews of the M&E process were held with EAN as part of the AC4SC project. These reviews allowed EAN to reflect critically on what they had been doing, what had worked well, what had not worked well, and what changes needed to happen to their processes. These changes sometimes included changing practices and approaches, adding new methods, and running training workshops.

Regular meetings of the AC4SC project, with people from EA international and the Australian academics helped to reflect on progress and any problems. Regular Skype chats between EAN M&E staff, and sometimes program staff, helped to reflect on how things were working, and provided an opportunity to provide additional training and advice, and to share information.

After training workshops, participants were asked to evaluate the training. After each stage of the research, and each data analysis report, those involved reflected on how the M&E and the reports might be strengthened in the future. On at least one occasion, someone external to EAN ran a reflection session, to evaluate how well the M&E systems and processes were working. This highlighted some particularly persistent problems, and alerted everyone to the need to pay attention to them.

The creation of this toolkit provided the most comprehensive reflection process, and encouraged EAN M&E staff to think carefully about how to pass on what they have learned, what works well, how, and why it is important. It also allowed them to identify both the strengths and the weaknesses or challenges inherent in a PM&E approach and to be very open and honest in their reflections.

### Dealing with power, gender, literacy and sensitive issues

#### Power issues

Issues of power arise when we conduct participatory research and evaluation. This is because power relationships are present in all social situations. This happens even when we try to treat everyone
equally and design activities that aim to be empowering for everyone. Some people are of a higher status or caste and others will defer to them rather than saying what they think. Some people know more about a topic or are very outspoken and will dominate the discussion. Some women and girls may be afraid to speak out due to their lower status in society and lack of confidence.

We need to be aware of these issues as they can affect who gets to speak and be heard in your PM&E activities and who is silenced and feels disempowered. Dealing with these issues also requires confidence and good skills in facilitation. You will find that this will gradually improve with practice.

**Gender issues**

Gender and power issues are closely related to one another. It is important to take gender issues into account when you are conducting your research. This is because they are fundamental to social change and development. As you know, women and girls are usually those who are the poorest, who work the longest hours, and who suffer discrimination that affects their health, wellbeing and opportunities.

You also need to consider whether it would be better to conduct some group activities with mixed gender groups or with single gender groups. It may be difficult for women and girls to talk about sensitive topics in the presence of men and boys. Men or boys may also tend to dominate discussion on some topics. It is important to gather data on the experiences and opinions of women and girls, as well as men and boys and to disaggregate this data so that you can identify any gender differences that are important to understanding your results and the process of social change. Each of these groups has different experiences that affect their view of life and how their situations and those of others could be improved.

**Literacy issues**

Some of the people who take part in your research may have a limited ability to read and write. Some participants will be able to read and write in the dominant language of your country while others may only know their own local language. You should consider this when you are selecting research tools and methods. Visual methods such as community mapping and the use of drawings or symbols to represent things may help people with poor literacy skills to take part more easily. Oral methods such as group discussions and interviews should also be used.

You should try to find out about the literacy level of participants before you plan your research activities and work out which methods will be most suitable. You will need to be creative and adapt some methods so that people who are illiterate can join in. For example, you could pair people who are illiterate with those who are literate so that the literate person can read instructions or other information to the illiterate person or write down their ideas and opinions.

**Sensitive issues**

Some of your research may involve looking at very sensitive issues such as domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, and homosexuality. Such issues may be difficult for some participants to talk about. For
example, some women may have experienced domestic violence or rape and may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about their experiences.

You will need to take a lot of care when planning and conducting research on sensitive or taboo topics. You should be sensitive to the needs and lives of vulnerable groups. Before beginning your research it may be useful to seek the advice of more experienced researchers or health workers who are involved in these areas. They can give you helpful tips on how to hold a discussion on these issues in a sensitive way that does not cause any harm to participants or make them feel more excluded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of an effective method for discussing sensitive topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritu wanted to learn more about women’s experiences of menstruation. She had found that it was difficult to get women to speak openly and easily about this topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To try to generate a sense of safely and trust, during a focus group discussion on this topic, Ritu closed all the windows and curtains in the room and asked the women who were participating to sit in a circle. The note taker sat to one side out of view. Ritu began by softly telling a story about her own experiences with menstruation. She then encouraged all of the women in the group to speak. Each of the women gradually spoke about their experiences. The discussion ended up going on for several hours.

Try not to make moral judgements about sensitive issues. It is important to use empathy and respect when doing research on topics such as HIV/AIDS. You also need to know the facts about such things as how HIV/AIDS is spread and how it can be prevented so that you can provide accurate information on this topic if required. Reading materials provided by Equal Access and other reputable organisations can help you to obtain such factual information.

Creating a safe environment and choosing a safe location for the discussion is very important. For interviews, this may be a person’s home or another place which is very private. The example in the box above gives you an example of a good way to create a safe environment. It will work best if you use a conversational style of interview. Building trust and rapport is also important. You should try to make sure that taking part in the research makes a positive difference to the lives of vulnerable people. This may include providing information or helping them to have a voice and be heard by others who have discriminated against them.

**Research ethics**

As the above section has indicated, doing participatory research can be difficult and challenging. For this reason you must be aware of the following important ethical issues:

**Explain yourself:** Before doing any research and evaluation activity you should tell people briefly but clearly:

- Why you are doing the research
- What you are trying to find out
- How you will use the information they give you.
Respect confidences: You must never tell people who are not involved in the research what people from your community tell you.

Treating people sensitively: Some research activities may create strong emotions in the people who are involved. Some people in the group may already have or may form close relationships. They must be treated sensitively.

Exploring sensitive issues: You must be prepared to explore sensitive issues in your research. You must respect other people’s opinions and even if you disagree with them. You must understand other people’s point of view and beliefs.

Never put people at risk: Reporting what people say and do can have real and serious consequences. You should think carefully about what could happen if others learn about what people said during your research activities. Your research is NOT more important than people’s lives or livelihoods.

Never put yourself at risk: You must be aware of dangerous situations and you should not put yourself in danger.

Seek approval: If you attend a community meeting or event and want to use some of the outcomes from that meeting or event in your research reports, make sure that you have permission to do so.

Respecting anonymity: You must always ask research participants if they are willing to have their name used in research reports or not. Usually it is better to keep participants’ names anonymous or to change a participant’s name if your report would be improved by using names.

Some final words

Taking the time to carefully plan your PM&E activities is vital to their success. As this module has indicated, there are many different issues to think about in the planning process. All of them are important to doing effective PM&E work. Since you need to make the best use of your time and other resources, you should try to make this process as manageable as possible. Involving your key stakeholders in the planning process will help to focus your plans on the most important aims of the evaluation. It will also encourage stakeholder ownership and active participation in the evaluation. Try to draw on the skills, knowledge and ideas of others as much as you can to develop useful and effective plans and to help spread the work load around.

Try to keep your plans as flexible as possible so that you can adjust them as necessary. Your PM&E process should be adapted and refined as you implement your plan and learn what works and what doesn’t work.

Do you need extra training and support to improve the quality of your PM&E outcomes?

Can you do things differently to achieve better results?
Experiment with different ways of doing things and regularly review and critically reflect on your work until you find the processes that work best for your organisation. As well as using well-known M&E methods, don’t be afraid to try some of the many creative and innovative approaches to M&E that have now been developed! You could find that they provide interesting and valuable results and help your research participants have some fun and feel a greater sense of empowerment from taking part in your research.
## Appendix 1: Part of a monitoring plan for the SSMK radio program

Note: This is partly based on EAN’s two month research plan for SSMK, April – May 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Research and data collection methods</th>
<th>Target no. of data</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Timeframe for data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maintain or improve a high level of listenership among youth in Nepal</td>
<td>At least 30% of target group who take part in research have listened to SSMK at least two times in a month over the previous six months or more</td>
<td>SQS, MSC (listening history questions)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>M&amp;E team, CRs</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Program content, format and issues meet the needs of the target audience</td>
<td>At least 50% of the target audience like the program content and format say that it reflects the issues of most interest to them</td>
<td>SQS, FDGs, CLFS</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>M&amp;E team, CRs</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One session in five research sites and one in head office</td>
<td></td>
<td>M&amp;E team (head office session); CRs (community sessions)</td>
<td>Sessions to be held bi-monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increase awareness and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS, and other related issues</td>
<td>At least 50% of the SSMK target group researched can identify the main risk and preventive measures of HIV and STIs</td>
<td>MSC, FDGs, SQS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>CRs</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>CRs</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>M&amp;E team</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Raise awareness among young people about disability issues</td>
<td>At least 70% of the young people researched were aware that differently abled young people have equal rights as others</td>
<td>FDGs, SQS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>CRs</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M&amp;E team</td>
<td>5 April – 28 May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2: Part of a proposed six month evaluation plan for the SSMK radio program

Note: This is partly based on the first six month research plan for SSMK, created as part of the AC4SC project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation questions</th>
<th>Sources of information from monitoring</th>
<th>Sources of information from evaluation data collection methods</th>
<th>Target number of data</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **How appropriate was the program for the target audience?**  
- How well did the issues covered in the program meet the needs of the target audience?  
- How well did the target audience find the program content, format and presentation interesting, informative and appropriate?  
| M&E reports on analysis of CR data  
Analysis of listener letters  
Analysis of feedback from CLFS  | FDGs conducted by the M&E team in other research sites | 6 | April - May |
| **How well have the objectives of the SSMK program been met?**  
- To what extent did SSMK listeners, in the past six months, take part in one or more activities such as collective action and individual participation in social debates?  
- To what extent can SSMK listeners give examples of using skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about any SSMK issues?  
- To what extent can SSMK listeners give examples of being involved in decision making at family and/or community levels?  
- To what extent have changes been observed in the attitude and behaviour of differently abled young people and young people around disability issues?  
| M&E reports on analysis of CR data  
Analysis of listener letters  | FDGs and interviews conducted by M&E team in other research sites with program listeners and others who can verify these activities  
MSC stories collected by the M&E team and SSMK program team in other research sites  
Data collected by community organisations  | FDGs: 6  
Interviews: 10  
MSC stories: 15 | May - July |
| **How can the SSMK program be improved?**  
- How can the program better meet the needs of a  
| M&E reports on analysis of CR data  
Analysis of listener letters  | FDGs (incorporating participatory techniques) and interviews by the M&E team in other research sites  | FDGs: 8  
Interviews: 12 | July - August |
| Question                                                                 | Analysis of feedback from CLFS                                                                 | Field work reports | FDGs and interviews conducted by M&E team in other research sites with listener club members, community reporters and others who can verify their activities | FDGs: 6
Interviews: 10
MSC stories: 10 | August - September |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>diverse range of young people, including youth in rural areas?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What contemporary issues are important to youth in the research sites?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What issues would listeners like to listen to on the program in the coming two months?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would they like this information to be presented?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How well are our outreach activities contributing to reaching the objectives of the SSMK program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How well are listener clubs working to help reach the objectives of the program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How active are the listener clubs in the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can we better support and train listener club facilitators?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What impacts are the activities of community reporters having?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|                                                                         |                                                                                               | Field work reports | FDGs and interviews conducted by M&E team in other research sites with listener club members, community reporters and others who can verify their activities | FDGs: 6
Interviews: 10
MSC stories: 10 | August - September |
|                                                                         |                                                                                               | Feedback on training | MSC stories                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                         |                                                                                               | MSC stories                                                                 | MSC stories collected by the M&E team and SSMK program team in other research sites                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
Appendix 3: Examples of partial theory of change maps for the SSMK and Naya Nepal radio programs

SSMK: Vision of success and stakeholder activities

**Donor organization**
1. Donor organizations generate more funds for youth based programs.
2. Timely monitoring of project.
3. Provides resources and resource person as per the need.
4. Timely interaction between project members and donors.

**SSMK Regional Hubs**
1. The hubs co-ordinate with listener clubs as well as monitoring and documenting their activities and promote the SSMK program in the community.
2. Provide local voices and feedback to incorporate in program.
3. Involved in participatory content production of SSMK by updating producers through local issues, relevance of contents and changing trends.

**FM stations**
1. FM has broadcast the program on prime time without reducing the content.
2. Provides local feedback on impact of program.

**Individual listeners**
1. Individual listeners change their behavior using different life skills they learn from the program and share the knowledge with their family and friends.
2. Individual listeners feel the importance of healthy discussion thus take initiative of forming a club.

**Government bodies**
1. Accessible government bodies provide support for resources.
2. Authentic source of information for legal matters.

**Local NGOs**
1. Provide sources of information, expertise in content making and disseminating the content (narrow-cast).
2. Co-ordinate and collaborate with SSMK regional hubs and listeners club, on the matter of same interests.
3. Help to evaluate the impacts of our program at the local level.

**Listener clubs**
1. Listener clubs mobilize youth and conduct various activities for social development.
2. Helps to promote SSMK at the local level.

**Vision of Success**
Youth are aware and empowered through “life skills” and have created different mediums of sharing ideas and views in society, creating an atmosphere where youth are free to speak their minds and act for the change they believe in.
Naya Nepal: Vision of success and stakeholders

**Vision of Success**
Well-informed and responsible citizens working together with different groups/organizations and government bodies for promoting good governance

**Government bodies**
Inclusive and stable government (bodies) provide equal, timely and quality services which are easily accessible to the general public.

**General public**
Voluntarily initiate discussion and participate in peace and political process with cohesiveness.

**Political parties**
Accessible and accountable to people.

**Radio listeners and groups**
Provide platform to debate and discuss public issues and embark on community activities to influence policies.

**Civil Society Organizations**
Advocating civil rights and responsibilities for/to the general public with complementing services.
Appendix 4: Sample Gantt chart for the implementation of a six month PM&E plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Develop 6 month plan:</td>
<td>J Feb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review objectives; adjust as necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review indicators or set as required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop research questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Select methods.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consult with stakeholders and revise plan as required</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conduct training as required</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prioritise first 2 month cycle questions and chosen methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement first 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review first 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Plan 2nd 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritise questions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Select methods</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Analyse data from 1st cycle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Write analysis report</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Circulate and discuss report</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implement second 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review second 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan 3rd 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritise questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Select methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyse data from 2nd cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write analysis report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Circulate and discuss report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement 3rd 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review third 2 month cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review 6 month plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop next 6 month plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consult with stakeholders and revise plan as required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct further training as required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyse data from 3rd cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write analysis report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Circulate and discuss report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>