

Monitoring & Evaluation

UN Peace Fund for Nepal Strategies and Lessons Learned

A. STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The UN Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN) established monitoring and evaluation systems both at the project and Strategic Outcome levels. The objectives of the M&E system were to:

- **Ensure evidence-based, well-coordinated programme implementation;**
- **Ensure timely and accurate reporting on results;**
- **Ensure accountability to project stakeholders;**
- **Track progress against targets.**

The systems and strategies described below are complementary to inter alia agency, Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office and/or Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) requirements, including bi-annual and annual reporting. In other words, only distinct UNPFN monitoring and evaluation practices are described below.

While several weaknesses were found in the system during implementation since 2007, necessary corrective measures were taken following the combination of 'learning by doing' and application of tested institutional methods.

Monitoring Systems at the Strategic Outcome Level

Strategic Results Framework

In order to demonstrate the UNPFN's higher-level peace-building contribution to Nepal, an overarching Strategic Results Framework was developed.

The UNPFN maintained an overview of key results against all Strategic Outcomes, drawn from all projects implemented since 2007. This provided an at-a-glance understanding of the scope of the UNPFN, and was shared with donors and other interested actors. It also formed an annex to the annual UNPFN report.

Mid-Year Narrative Summary of Results

UNPFN prepared a Mid-Year Narrative Summary of Results to better support the annual reporting of in-country donors. The UNPFN annual report is not published before May of the following year, yet most donors have to submit their annual reports much earlier. The mid-year narrative report covering project results from January to September assisted in bridging the gap. The report was compiled based on projects' quarterly reports, focusing on key outputs and results, including of the UNPFN Support Office.

Hybrid annual UNPFN/PBF report

Since 2010, all UNPFN projects, whether funded through bilateral funds or the PBF, were covered by one consolidated annual report. The main focus of this report was on the results at the strategic outcome level. Results of projects PBF funded through the UNPFN were also noted in the PBF annual report.

Monitoring & Evaluation Systems at the Project Level

As per UNPFN project proposal guidelines, all projects had to assign a proportion of their total budgets for cross-cutting issues including monitoring and evaluation. Actual expenditure on M&E activities had to be reported through the final project evaluation.

Results frameworks

In line with the emphasis of PBF for stronger results orientation, on the approval of projects in the 2012 funding round, the Executive Committee recommended that all projects review their results frameworks. The UNPFN Support Office provided technical assistance for this, including consideration for whether the indicators at the impact level

measured the underlying peacebuilding aim of the project; supported reporting on PBF indicators (where relevant); aligned with UNDAF indicators (where relevant); and of course, met the requirements of SMART indicators. All relevant indicators had to be disaggregated by sex and caste/ethnicity.

The UNPFN Support Office also supported projects to incorporate indicators that assess the gender, inclusion and conflict sensitivity of projects.

Joint field monitoring visits

As part of the effort to ensure better coordination with the Nepal Peace Trust Fund, and government and development partners, quarterly joint field monitoring missions were institutionalized. Joint missions were guided by TORs, including a pre-mission meeting, mission de-briefings, and preparation of a mission report. The aim of the joint field monitoring visits were to jointly meet project implementing partners and/or beneficiaries at the field level, assess project progress, and document challenges and lessons learned. Projects had to adjust and/or redefine field interventions based on the recommendations of joint field visits.

The joint monitoring visits were organized in different parts of the country on a rotational principle, based on presence of both UNPFN and NPTF projects, a thematic focus, and/or taking into account weather and other relevant factors impacting travel and accessibility.

Quarterly Reports

Quarterly reports focused on reporting on results at a glance, mostly at the outcome level, and on project management activities and challenges.

Assessing and evaluating UNPFN projects

The UNPFN Support Office supported the timely and quality assessment of projects throughout their implementation cycle, including through:

a) Project Health Checks:

Bilateral meetings were organized with each project to discuss status of project inception activities including recruitment, work plan finalization, identification of implementing partners and finalization of results frameworks (review, completion of baselines etc.).

A timeframe was agreed for meeting any pending tasks. This meeting formed the basis of reporting to the UNPFN Executive Committee on project status and progress.

b) Mid-term Assessments:

All projects completed a mid-term assessment. Though it was left up to projects to determine the process (for example hiring an external consultant, through a stakeholder meeting etc.), a framework for the assessment was provided by the UNPFN Support Office. This highlighted the need to review how cross-cutting issues (gender, inclusion and conflict sensitivity) were addressed. Projects were required to submit a management response to the recommendations of the assessment. This was reviewed during annual reporting to ensure issues that required attention as per the mid-term assessment had been addressed.

c) Project End Evaluations:

As stipulated in the UNPFN project proposal template and guidelines, all projects had to complete an independent project end evaluation undertaken by external and independent entities or experts. The UNPFN project evaluation guidelines were complementary to agencies' corporate guidelines. They were developed to ensure a certain degree of comparability and complementarity among UNPFN funded evaluations and were an instrumental part of analyzing the UNPFN's strategic contribution to peacebuilding. The UNPFN Support Office reviewed all project end evaluation TORs prior to their finalization.

A major part of the guidelines was to ensure that projects reported on expenditure on gender, inclusion, M&E and conflict sensitivity activities, and any related challenges. Project end evaluations were required to include a table showing planned expenditure (which was noted in the project document) against actual expenditure on these components.

B. LESSON LEARNED

These lessons learned have been collected through a review of UNPFN project reports, assessments and evaluations, and through observation, discussions and interactions with various project colleagues at national and local level.

Results Frameworks

A number of projects, particularly approved by the UNPFN in the beginning of the peacebuilding mission, could not assess and record their project contributions and/or results, which had no results monitoring plans backed by well-designed result framework.

A few projects were found weak in defining the higher level results of their projects, i.e. how the project overall contributed to peacebuilding in Nepal. Even at the output level, some projects had difficulties in being able to concretely show and measure what their results were. Where indicators were established at the wrong level, it was difficult to ascertain visible changes from project activities.

[Developing a results database for the indicators facilitates progress tracking. It needs to be updated regularly via progress/final feedback from service providers, training service providers, etc. along with verification and monitoring spot checks by project staff and technical consultants.](#)

Baseline and Theory of Change

Lack of baselines, or inconsistencies between baselines and endlines, made it difficult for a few projects to set targets and verify progress. Without a baseline, setting targets is arbitrary. With no targets, it is not possible to assess progress. At the same time, targets need to be realistic (neither too high nor too low) to facilitate valuable quantitative and qualitative assessment of progress.

Some projects that did not verify baseline information found that the underlying project design/change assumptions were inappropriate, causing severe delays and challenges in implementation. A baseline assessment or beneficiary analysis is particularly

important for the design of peacebuilding projects that are meant to provide rehabilitation or other individualised services packages; specific and detailed information of target population needs, capacities and aspirations, as well as those of the 'market' (i.e. the demand) is essential.

[Indicators also need to monitor the theory of change underlying the project, to see whether the assumed changes are being brought about.](#)

Reporting

Reporting on a quarterly basis was found to be too burdensome for projects. This was particularly true for joint UN projects that needed to compile reports between two or more agencies.

Quarterly reporting was particularly burdensome for projects with many implementing partners and where the reporting timelines of the partners are not in sync with the Fund's reporting timelines.

Monitoring

Several projects established effective information management tools that supported project monitoring. Documenting and disseminating lessons learned were valuable both for the participating UN organisations but also others implementing similar projects. Projects with implementing partners that did not have data collection mechanisms, or related capacities, found it difficult to develop a consistent picture of the project's progress.

[Projects need to ensure adequate human resources for regular monitoring. Mechanisms to provide feedback based on the monitoring activities are important, and a way for the project to make needed changes to implementation. Projects with good monitoring tools and frequent monitoring missions and follow-up with their implementing partners are able to track results and report on them in a timely manner, due to maintaining constant accurate information on progress.](#)

Some projects made commendable efforts through project monitoring and mid-term assessments to review their beneficiaries' vulnerabilities and made modifications in their projects to address these. However, ensuring that this analysis was already done in the planning phase was more efficient, as it allowed for adequate budgeting for the additional support needs.

Projects need baselines and established targets to be able to monitor the inclusion of specific beneficiary groups in their projects. If disaggregated data shows that certain stakeholder groups are not accessing services, a project can take additional steps to find out why this is and make necessary project modifications.

Monitoring was also extended to service delivery. A few projects found that their implementing partners were not delivering quality services or targeting beneficiaries as per the agreement, and much closer on-the-ground monitoring was needed to rectify this. Use of a project-specific monitoring tool was effective for assessing such gaps and providing on the spot suggestions and support to ensure quality of service delivery.

Including results management duties in the service providers' contracts is an effective way of highlighting the importance of monitoring activities. This provision needs to be accompanied by relevant trainings to partner organisations to ensure success.

In addition to monitoring the achievements of the projects, there was a need to monitor how the projects achieved these results with respect to cross-cutting issues such as conflict sensitivity and gender. One programme increased participation in its activities, when it realised through monitoring activities, that many beneficiaries were absent because of sickness. By including medical service provision as part of the project implementation in its project, participation was increased.

Joint Monitoring Missions

Joint monitoring missions provided the opportunity to local population to directly raise their needs and concerns with those ultimately responsible for addressing them. Such missions garnered ownership and support from higher level stakeholders, and were a way to show support to the local level implementing partners.

Client-exit surveys as well as debriefing meetings with local stakeholders are effective ways to share achievements but also gather information on how to improve the quality of services.

Missions require a lot of time and preparation, everyone needs to be on board and clear on the objective, or they can fail to provide in-depth understanding of issues and challenges. From the perspective of participants, who have differing levels of knowledge about the projects, and from the perspective of mission hosts and projects being visited, it was essential that there was some agreement on what was the purpose of the mission.

Following up on recommendations and observations from donors, monitoring missions consistently proved to be a challenge and needed further attention and consideration. Partly, this was also linked to a broader challenge and perception about responsibility to and possibilities of flexibility to change project activities or methodologies.

Highly important, from a conflict sensitive view point, is to provide feedback to the participants of any meetings that are held during the mission.