

This paper offers some basic concepts and terminology that are helpful for understanding how learning from projects can be enhanced. The concepts presented here are loosely based on the Outcome Mapping approach. For a more thorough overview on Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) approaches please access the referenced reading.

Target Groups:

Every project has direct and indirect target groups. Direct target groups are the people you are addressing and dealing with directly (e.g. teachers receiving training, public servants getting new information, etc.). Indirect target groups are the ones having the final benefit of your project (e.g. students taught by the teachers, clients served by the public administration officials).

Outcomes:

Desired “Outcomes” describe how you want each of these target groups to be affected (or changed) by the project. In most cases, it is possible to describe this change in terms of new behavior (e.g. the teacher is not only giving lectures but is now using interactive teaching methods; the student is not skipping school any more but is interested in learning and participating in class).

Impacts:

While the “Outcomes” describe changes in regards to the target groups, “Impacts” are more long term and describe changes on a societal level. Usually it is quite difficult to prove how social change can actually be attributed to a specific project. Still, it is important to be clear how the project aims to contribute to positive social development and how outcomes are transformed into impacts (e.g. target groups functions as multipliers, projects serve as best practices or pilot programs are scaled up).

Indicators:

“Indicators” are specific observable characteristics that tell you if you are actually making progress in reaching a goal. For example, an indicator of increased awareness for the need of preventative health care in a community can be the number of new clients accessing medical screening at a community health center over a given period of time.

While result indicators outline measurable conditions that are given once an objective is reached, progress indicators describe the steps between a target groups’ current behavior and their desired behavior. For example, the desired steps of behavior change of a currently inactive youth towards social engagement could look like this: Step 1: Get off the couch and take part in a social event. Step 2: Get more regularly involved with the group organizing the social event Step 3: Contribute to organizing social events within the group. Step 4. Initiate projects and events within the group and beyond.

To systematically track changes of behavior of your target groups, a monitoring system is needed. Monitoring refers to continuously gathering data related to the defined progress and results indicators at the beginning of the project, during the project, and after the termination of the project.