



## Learning Alliance Briefing Note 7: A framework for monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes (draft)

Prepared by John Butterworth and Carmen Dasilva, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre

### Introduction

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is an integral part of good project management. At the most basic level it may simply focus on outputs i.e. were the intended deliverables of a project completed on time and to a sufficient standard. In the context of complex, multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary, learning-orientated and innovation-focused projects like SWITCH (Sustainable Water Management Improves Tomorrow's Cities' Health [www.switchurbanwater.eu](http://www.switchurbanwater.eu)), M&E needs to be much more elaborate.

Although it may be possible to plan the goal of the project (e.g. more sustainable, efficient and socially inclusive urban water management through widespread adoption of integrated approaches) it is almost impossible, at the outset, to design the right set of actions to achieve this goal in different cities. And even if it were, the ground in cities is constantly shifting. People change positions, institutions evolve, politics follows its course and innovation (hopefully) happens. For these reasons, project design needs to be constantly revisited. Projects need to continually learn and re-orientate themselves in order to be successful. In SWITCH, this learning is facilitated by multi-stakeholder learning alliances focused at the city level.

Monitoring deliverables is clearly not enough then. But monitoring impacts (the more sustainable, more efficient and more socially inclusive water management that is strived for) is possibly a step to far. Indicators of most of these changes could realistically only be expected to show significant changes over a timescale of decades, well after the end of the 5 year time span of the SWITCH project. Furthermore, the ultimate impacts will not easily be attributed to project interventions within an initiative like SWITCH because there are a whole lot of other actors and factors driving innovation and change in fields like urban water management. Hence monitoring impacts will probably be too late and too distant to influence project implementation. So what is the alternative?

This briefing note argues that the SWITCH project and its learning alliances should focus on the outcome level. Outcomes fall between outputs and impacts. Outcomes on the one hand are more than the production of deliverables, but on the other hand they reflect more immediate changes than the ultimate impacts sought. Most of the indicators and targets proposed in this note are related to these kind of intermediate changes. The note aims to provide guidance for SWITCH learning alliances to monitor and keep track of the such outcomes. To be successful this monitoring must form the basis for evaluation and changes in project implementation.

It is assumed that a mix of both quantitative and qualitative indicators and methods will be needed for monitoring change in an area like Integrated Urban Water Management (IUWM). Some things may be relatively easy to monitor, especially hardware (e.g. the number of people served by a water supply systems, kilometres of pipeline installed, etc.), but others are much more difficult to track especially the software (e.g. perceptions, behaviour change, collaboration etc.). Since learning alliances (see Briefing Note No.1 for an introduction) place emphasis on these software issues, specific tailored methods are required.

One tool that is suitable for monitoring these 'software' outcomes, is known as descriptive ordinal scoring or 'micro-scenarios'<sup>1</sup>. Our aim here is to provide ideas based upon this method that can be adapted and used in each SWITCH city.

The micro-scenario method, if used, should compliment other approaches to monitoring change such as process documentation methods (see learning alliance briefing note no.6) and others. There are advanced M&E methods of course that are specifically adapted to monitoring at outcome level such as the 'most significant change' method and outcome mapping. Where significant levels of resources are available for M&E these may be appropriate and resources linked to these methods will always be useful for inspiration. However, with relatively limited resources for monitoring, most SWITCH learning alliances will only be able to implement a simplified alternative like micro-scenarios.

### Micro-scenarios as a framework for M&E within SWITCH city learning alliances

Learning alliances in SWITCH (see briefing note no. 3) are intended to:

- break down barriers to both horizontal and vertical information sharing and learning within cities, and

<sup>1</sup> This approach draws on the Methodology for Participatory Assessment (MPA) and on Qualitative Information Appraisal (QIA). Both use participatory methods to record people's perceptions, QIA translates these descriptions into scores and numbers. MPA was originally designed for a global study involving IRC and partners and WSP together with 88 communities in 15 countries

- speed up processes of identification, development and uptake of solutions related to urban water management.

The micro-scenarios scoring method provides a starting point for reflection on these types of objectives. It potentially allows for some comparison across cities where the indicators and scenarios are common. More likely, over the course of the SWITCH project the scenarios could be used to assess changes over time in a given city. These indicators should be adapted to fit the different city situations. It is suggested that participatory methods are used to gather information which can then be converted into qualitative data.

Micro-scenarios are used to identify different levels of achievement of a mainly qualitative change that can be objectively assessed in a participatory way. Key elements of the approach are:

- Stakeholders choose the micro-scenario that most adequately reflects the situation.
- Ordinal scoring options are benchmarked and peer-reviewed.
- The reason for a specific score is recorded.

To use 'micro-scenarios' in monitoring SWITCH learning alliances and research activities it will be necessary to:

- Identify key change objectives together with stakeholders. It is important to ensure unambiguous wording so that all involved understand the indicators.
- Identify the different levels: 'micro-scenarios'. Define the key word that distinguishes each level (Each level has a score on a scale of 0-100).
- Identify a 'benchmark' – what is the minimum acceptable level we would like to achieve in SWITCH?
- Identify a 'baseline'. What is the current level?
- Monitor at regular intervals: record, reflect and discuss why has change taken place (or not)? What actions are required?

### **Possible objectives, indicators and scenarios for SWITCH learning alliances**

The following examples are intended to be just that: examples. The list is not comprehensive and will need to be extended. In all cases the indicators, their wording and benchmarks will need to be adapted. These examples have not been pre-tested and that would certainly reveal flaws in their wording that will need to be addressed.

*Objective 1: We know who learning alliance members are, and how to communicate with them effectively*

Indicators could include the availability of a record of learning alliance members, and participation of members of events and activities. Five possible micro-scenarios are:

- This is no accessible record of learning alliance members.

- There is only an out-of-date record of learning alliance members.
- There is an up-to-date record of learning alliance members and some basic tools (email, phone) are used to communicate regularly [benchmark].
- There is an up-to-date record of learning alliance members and advanced tools (e.g. a google group that archives information) are used to communicate regularly.
- There is an up-to-date accessible online database of learning alliance members with contact details, participation in all events and activities is systematically recorded and a combination of methods is used effectively to communicate between events.

*Objective 2: Multi-stakeholder engagement is based upon sound research and analysis*

Indicators could include the availability and use of a stakeholder analysis (see Briefing Note No.2).

- No formal stakeholder analysis (following a basic methodology) was undertaken.
- Limited stakeholder analysis was undertaken but is only documented in reports of meetings rather than in a consolidated analysis.
- Limited stakeholder analysis was undertaken, documented and shared too late to influence project decision-making [benchmark].
- Stakeholder analysis was undertaken, documented and shared in a timely manner but results are of limited depth of analysis.
- Stakeholder analysis involves participation of most key learning alliance members and documentation to a standard providing sufficient depth of analysis leading to regular use for follow-up and decision making by the project.

*Objective 3: The learning alliance action plan/ city storyline is regularly reviewed and updated*

Indicators could include awareness of the plan and participation in updating it. Five possible micro-scenarios are:

- Learning alliance members are not aware of the learning alliance action plan/ city storyline.
- There is limited awareness of the original learning alliance action plan/ city storyline but it has not been revisited or updated since it was produced.
- Most learning alliance members know the contents of the learning alliance action plan/ city storyline and where to find the document [benchmark].
- Most learning alliance members know the contents of the learning alliance action plan/ city storyline and progress has been discussed regularly in meeting.
- Every six months progress is checked against the plan, reported and changes are incorporated in a revised version of the plan

*Objective 4: Regular, effective and innovative events capture interest of learning alliance members*

Indicators could include the regularity and quality of events organized or supported by SWITCH learning alliances. Five possible micro-scenarios are:

- Events (e.g. workshops, site visits, seminars) are not regular and only announced at the last minute
- Regular events are held but they are poorly facilitated and fail to attract the interest of learning alliance members.
- Appropriate events are announced well in advance and use a mix of mainly standard methods to effectively engage interest of city stakeholders at least once every six months [benchmark].
- Quarterly (or more frequent) events use innovative facilitation methods (not just presentations and discussion) but tend to be poorly documented leading to a loss of good ideas and content.
- Quarterly (or more frequent) events use innovative facilitation methods and high-quality reports are rapidly made available.

*Objective 5: A regular, quality flow of information between learning alliance members*

Indicators might relate to the breadth and depth of communication between learning alliance members and especially the type of information which is shared. Five possible micro-scenarios are:

- Learning alliance members share little or no information outside of their own organisation.
- Learning alliance members share information with selected other organisations and learning alliance members but only when it is positive and suits their own objectives.
- A core group of learning alliance members share a wide range of information, potentially reflecting both negative and positive outcomes of activities and leading to joint learning, but only in ad-hoc ways [benchmark].
- Learning alliance members agree to systematise information sharing (e.g. using a platform or database).
- A regularly updated website is widely used by learning alliance members to share information both within and outside the learning alliance, and other communication channels (e.g. e-mail) are supported and archived.

*Objective 6: Stakeholders are involved in priority setting in research*

Indicators might include participation in planning and the ability of users of research to influence that planning.

- Learning alliance members were not consulted about key research questions, partners involved and locations of work.
- Learning alliance members were consulted but were only able to make minor changes and or suggestions to the research plan.
- Learning alliance members were consulted and were able to make significant changes and or suggestions to the research plan [benchmark].

- Learning alliance members took their own initiative to propose changes and or suggestions to the research plan based upon their own needs.
- Learning alliance members were involved at all stages of research planning, and gave explicit approval to the current 18 month plan.

*Objective 7: Demonstration activities are undertaken within a framework for scaling-up*

Indicators here would relate to the existence of demonstration plans, the level of ownership of those plans and commitments to scaling-up implementation

- Demonstration activities are initiated without discussion in the learning alliance.
- Demonstration activities are decided with limited consultation within the learning alliance.
- Demonstration activity plans are consistent (and/ or merged) with learning alliance action plans/ city storylines and are supported but without clear commitments to scaling-up by some one or more members [benchmark].
- Learning alliance members with potential to scale up demonstration activities pro-actively made suggestions and proposals that were addressed in demonstration plans.
- Learning members maintain a keen interest in demonstration activities at all stages and show clear commitment to scale-up successful interventions in their policies and actions.

*Objective 8: We understand why change is occurring in relation to integrated urban water management, not just what happens*

A key indicator could be the amount and quality of process documentation (see learning alliance briefing note no 6) to capture the change process and its dimensions and motivations.

- No process documentation is in place.
- Occasional process documentation is undertaken using some of available tools (including different media such as writing, photography, film etc) but with limited attention to detail or quality.
- A few process documentation tools are used regularly but results are not widely shared [benchmark].
- Several process documentation tools are used regularly and results are widely shared within the learning alliance [benchmark].
- Effective process documentation using a combination of tools tracks not just project outcomes but why those changes occurred, especially the unexpected and unplanned, and sharing within the learning alliance leads to double loop learning.

*Objective 9: Issues of social inclusion (gender, poverty, other marginalised groups) are systematically mainstreamed across all project activities in the city.*

- Most research activities have not considered their potential impact on marginalised groups, and an

understanding of gender issues is not even addressed within the project team.

- Good awareness of poverty and gender issues within the research team and learning alliance is not reflected in work plans (except of the social inclusion work package).
- Good awareness leads to specifically targeted actions to address social inclusion within several activities or work packages [benchmark].
- The impact of mainstreamed project activities to address social inclusion is tracked by monitoring against appropriate indicators.
- Best practices to promote social inclusion are scaled up by members of the learning alliance.

*Objective 10: The learning alliance contributes to empowerment of marginalised groups*

Indicators could include participation of marginalised groups (or their representatives) in events and decision-making

- No special efforts are made to include marginal groups or their representatives.
- Marginalised groups are informed e.g. of the meeting date and time.
- Marginalised groups are informed well in advance of meeting date, time and agenda [benchmark].
- Marginalised groups are informed well in time of the meeting date, time and agenda, in addition special efforts are made to help prepare them to attend.
- Location and time convenience were considered in organising meeting to maximise participation of marginalised groups.

*Objective 11: Resources (in-kind and cash) are levered as a result of working in partnerships*

Indicators might include leverage of other partners activities, resources etc.

- No inputs from outside the project (apart from required matching funds of consortium partners) are supporting learning alliance activities.
- Occasional small investments are made from learning alliance members on an ad-hoc basis.
- Occasional significant investments are made from learning alliance members on an ad-hoc basis [benchmark].
- Considerable and regular investments or commitments have been made to support learning alliance activities such as co-funding events and are included in budgeted plans.
- Commitments have been secured for 100% of future learning alliance costs, include costs of facilitation.

### Some notes on methodology and reflection

Users of the micro-scenarios method might want to think about the following questions:

*How is data analysis done?* Data analysis is relatively simple. Scores between 0 and 100 (50 for the

benchmark, 0 for the worst case and 100 for the best case) can be easily recorded and compared.

*How reliable are the results and how do you avoid bias?* While scoring can be done by the project team, involvement of stakeholders in the process is a key principle of this approach and leads to more reliability as well as ownership of the change process. Involvement in setting the micro-scenarios, as well as the assessment is desirable. Reliability is enhanced by pre-testing micro-scenarios and ensuring they are very carefully worded (language is a key issue and scenarios will not easily be translated but rather will need to be redrafted in other languages and locations). M&E will be less biased if an impartial researcher (i.e. not involved in other SWITCH activities) is also involved and empowered to provide constructive input.

*How can data be presented?* Scoring results can be illustrated in a visual way by using graphs, charts or web diagrams. Such presentation can help facilitate discussion.

*How can results influence learning and change?* A key aspect of creating a good learning environment in the learning alliances is to reflect on progress and to define next steps based upon experience of what works and what doesn't. Regular identification of 'lessons learned' for different stakeholders and internal or external audiences will help to systematize SWITCH project experiences. Critical reflection requires asking 'why?', "so what?" and "now what?". Identifying the reason for a particular score or change in scores using the micro-scenarios method will help uncover issues underlying project performance. This can help to identify possible catalysers or constraints and ways to overcome them.

### Links and resources

*Method for Participatory Assessment guideline* (includes examples of micro-scenario tools) at [www.wsp.org/publications/mpa%202003.pdf](http://www.wsp.org/publications/mpa%202003.pdf)

*Outcome mapping* at [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca)

*Qualitative Information Systems* at [www.irc.nl/page/12940](http://www.irc.nl/page/12940) and *Making monitoring simple and useful* at [www.irc.nl/page/15628](http://www.irc.nl/page/15628)

*Qualitative Information Appraisal: using people's perceptions in large development projects* by A.J. James, Postma L., Otte, C. IRC (unpublished).

**For more information please contact:** John Butterworth, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre ([butterworth@irc.nl](mailto:butterworth@irc.nl)) who coordinates the learning alliance work package within the SWITCH project, or Carmen Dasilva ([dasilva@irc.nl](mailto:dasilva@irc.nl)) who co-authored this briefing note.

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