

# MEASURING CHANGE:

A Guide to Participatory  
Monitoring and Evaluation of  
Communication for Social Change

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# Part INTRODUCTION

## 1 What is this guide about and who is it for?

Learning *to* change involves learning *from* change.

Learning *from* change involves *changing* who learns.

This guide is for all those involved in communication for social change (CFSC) processes, but especially for those people who are facilitating the dialogue and implementation processes. It should be useful when monitoring and evaluating CFSC processes and evolving change, such as shifts in the dominant norms or beliefs in a defined community. This guide should help your community to better determine if changes the group decides on have been made, or not.

The term “community” is used here to refer to everyone involved in the communication for social change dialogue. Those helping to facilitate CFSC processes within a community should be committed to the principle that indicators and assessment tools must be developed as a collaborative process with the community, and not be pre-determined.

An effective Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) process is based on dialogue. This guide is intended to help participants, including those most affected by change, to ask and consider essential questions about what they propose to change, whether or not desired change has been accomplished, and how successful the initiative has been. The views and voices of all participants should be heard in this process.

As a guide, it is intended to be adapted and used flexibly. Please do your best to adapt it to local needs and context. The questions posed aim to inspire deeper thought and discussion amongst participants about how best to monitor and evaluate their processes of social change. The guide is offered as a work in progress. Your learning will help the CFSC Consortium—which provides research, training and evidence gathering in this field—to update and revise this guide as needed. Please document your experiences, reflect upon them and share your learning and observations with the Consortium and with others about how you strengthen the community’s capacity to create and learn from change. And about how CFSC can be best evaluated and monitored.

## 2 What is Communication for Social Change (CFSC)?

CFSC is a process of public and private dialogue through which people themselves define who they are, what they need and how to get what they need in order to improve their own lives. It utilizes dialogue that leads to collective problem identification, decision-making and community-based implementation of solutions to development issues.<sup>1</sup>

Genuine dialogue demands a meaningful process of democratic participation by people living and working in the defined community. This has significant implications: throughout the process you need to consider who is participating (who is able or enabled to participate), how and why they are doing so, and who is not participating. This demands reflecting on who is included or not included in the “community” you are working with, and the degree to which dialogue participants genuinely represent the groups for whom they claim to speak. In CFSC work, traditional, hierarchical decision-making processes and structures are inevitably challenged. Those facilitating the CFSC process help everyone involved to truly listen to the voices or representatives of less powerful groups. The facilitator must be ready to negotiate different interests and perspectives, in a well-facilitated process. A degree of conflict is to be expected as the community engages in CFSC processes of dialogue and decision-making.

CFSC helps individuals and communities strengthen their capacity to communicate in person, through the arts, or by using media or other communication technologies. It encourages people to identify obstacles and develop communication structures, policies, processes, media and tools to achieve desired “social change”—that is, positive change in people’s lives as they themselves define such change.

CFSC processes will work most effectively if the community strengthens its communication capacity, at individual and collective levels. Thus CFSC aims to empower previously marginalized or less powerful communities to become “self-renewing,” or able to manage their own communication processes for their own benefit.

Like all participatory approaches, CFSC takes many forms but is firmly grounded in underlying principles and values (Box 1).

<sup>1</sup> For further information see:  
<http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mission.php>

### **BOX 1: CORE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

- Meaningful involvement of people directly affected at all steps of the process (from dialogue to assessment).
- Belief that every voice should be heard.
- Participation and local ownership of the communication process and contents.
- Local control is essential. CFSC favors a “bottom-up” approach, placing ownership, access, and control of communication in the hands of affected people and communities, rather than focusing on “top-down” persuasion and information dissemination.
- Focused deliberation, collective decision-making and collective action.
- Equity and respect for local cultures, cultural identity, beliefs and knowledge. Belief that what is happening in the society impacts the communication process, and that effective communication must impact the society as well as the individual.
- Dialogue and negotiation—both private and public—is essential to communication and for social change to last.

## **3 The relevance of CFSC**

Mass education and information campaigns aimed at changing individual behaviour are important. Yet experience shows that even in the most information-rich societies individual change cannot be sustained without deep-rooted social change. Communication is fundamental to changing cultural and social norms and sustaining changes in behaviour and in social conditions.

Conventional communication approaches can limit the sustainability of change by:

- Striving to own or control local action, instead of empowering affected or impacted communities,
- Creating strategies that neglect the complex social, political and environmental factors that influence behaviour and attitudes,
- Expecting overwhelmed government and/or other sectors to take major responsibility,
- Inadequately recognizing the intimate links between poverty, marginalization, discrimination and vulnerability, which call for more comprehensive, empowering and flexible strategies and interventions.

#### **In contrast, CFSC approaches:**

- Engage people actively as agents of their own change
- Equip those most affected to play a central communication role and decide how and when to seek assistance

from technical experts and external agencies

- Facilitate and support dialogue on key issues of concern within a context in which everyone can participate and understand
- Negotiate the best way forward through partnerships, rather than through persuasion or coercion.

Experience from different fields illustrates the value of CFSC approaches.

### **ILLUSTRATION i: HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND CARE**

Every day AIDS kills more than 8,000 people, yet HIV/AIDS is a preventable and manageable condition. Mass education campaigns play a crucial role in HIV/AIDS prevention and care but are not enough on their own.

Numerous social, cultural and political factors underpin HIV/AIDS related “risk behaviours.” These include: poverty, inequality, prejudice, the status of women, the responsibility of men, marginalization, disempowerment, gender-based violence, community and social cohesion, among others.

Sustaining changes in behaviour and social conditions is fundamentally about fostering and supporting communication in society. Conventional approaches to HIV/ AIDS communication have been reassessed in light of the following:

- The ever-increasing scale and severity of the epidemic despite efforts to contain it.
- Major international interventions have sometimes worked against communities and societies taking ownership and leading the fight against HIV/AIDS for themselves.
- The need to address individual behaviour as well as the social, political and environmental factors that influence behaviour.
- The value of drama and other arts forms, to address such sensitive issues.
- The need for more flexible and empowering strategies, and more horizontal communication, when intervening in this sensitive and complex field.
- The growing complexity of societies given greater liberalization, more complex media systems and more complex communication patterns – which demand fresh thinking and approaches.

In this context communication for social change approaches offer a positive alternative.

## ILLUSTRATION ii: GENDER

In Africa, nearly 65 percent of the girls who should be enrolled in school are not.

Families often make the difficult choice not to send their daughters to school for a complex set of reasons including concern for their daughters' safety when travelling to and from school on remote roads, the pressing need for girls to help their mothers at home with younger children, inadequate bathroom facilities for girls at many schools, or perceptions that an educated boy is more valuable to his parents than an educated girl.

Public and private dialogue about what the social norms are within a community about female education and how well-educated women can raise better educated, more productive families, has led communities throughout Africa to increase the numbers of girls in school. Through dialogue and community action, education ministers and other political leaders have allocated more money to girls' education, appointed more female administrators and headmistresses, and, in some countries like Kenya and Ghana, passed laws mandating universal primary education for both girls and boys.

The girls enrolled in school—working through organizations like the Forum for African Women Educationalists—are among the most effective advocates for change.

## 4 How do we know if CFSC is working?

All monitoring and evaluation raises questions including: Who is monitoring or evaluating what and why? For whom? Whose agenda is being served? Who should decide what evidence is needed and what forms it should take? How are monitoring and evaluation tools to be designed and indicators identified? Who will gather, analyze and interpret the data? How will the findings be used and by whom? If we encourage all participants to engage in dialogue about change, we should also involve all participants in answering questions about monitoring and evaluating such change.

The approach promoted in this guide builds on a solid base of theory and practice developed for participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation. When doing this work, you need to assess short-term improvements in community communication capacity and begin to determine the contribution such enhanced capacity makes to broader, longer-term social change. You might, for example, look for evidence of stronger communication skills and a higher degree of "connectedness" (horizontal and vertical). People who can more effectively make their voices heard in

community decision-making processes can also speak with those in other communities, or those in power, in support of more defined improvements and change.

## 5 What is Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation?

There is no one approach to PM&E which, by definition, varies according to context and local needs. Traditional, externally driven evaluations, however, have been widely criticised for their neglect of the voices of people and communities most affected. This has fueled growing interest in PM&E in recent decades, across sectors. While the definitions vary, a core set of principles guide the process. The what, how, whom and why of evaluation are closely inter-linked in PM&E.

All the above give PM&E the potential to improve project planning and management, to strengthen institutional learning and to influence and inform policy.

### BOX 2: CORE PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION

- The approach stems from the belief that determination of the success of a development initiative should be made by those it is intended to benefit, on their own terms.
- Space is created for intended beneficiaries to reflect and themselves determine whether or not they have benefited, how, and what could be improved.
- A wide range of people are actively involved as subjects in a participatory process, from design onwards.
- The process is applied and of practical value to those participating.
- Local (lived) knowledge and experience is respected and emphasized. Inequities of power and voice are acknowledged and addressed.
- Traditional hierarchies are broken down, including those between people (different stakeholders) and between types of knowledge ("expert" versus indigenous/lay).
- Capacity development (reflection, analysis, learning, problem-solving) is central to the process, as skills and attributes of wider relevance are nurtured.
- There is conscious attention to strengthening mutual learning, beyond the boundaries of the project.
- Understanding and mutual respect are deepened through a collaborative learning process.
- The process is educational and empowering.
- In general affected people and communities evaluate and outsiders facilitate.
- Attitudes and openness to change are crucial.

Political, cultural and organisational factors, among others, will determine *how participatory* a monitoring and evaluation process is. It is therefore useful to think of PM&E along a continuum and consider what would make the process more (rather than less) participatory, for each community and at different stages in CFSC. Fundamentally in participatory monitoring & evaluation, as in communication for social change, the *process* is as important as the outcomes such as recommendations and results.

PM&E has the potential to embrace a range of perceptions, encourage joint analysis and strengthen learning amongst all involved. The sensitivities and complexities inherent to many development programmes, e.g. on HIV/AIDS communication or gender, fit well with less pre-determined, more open and more community-specific approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Importantly, monitoring and evaluating CFSC in a participatory way will highlight the links between particular communities and project/programme outcomes and impact. In common with other process-oriented evaluations, it will provide a more comprehensive and dynamic view of impacts throughout the lifetime of an initiative.

# Part B

## IMPLEMENTING PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION

In PM&E processes opportunities are created for different dialogue members to share their experience and concerns, articulate their needs, learn about each other's concerns, deepen their understanding and make collective decisions. In each specific context it is important to be aware of factors that will help the process and those that might present challenges, and plan accordingly.

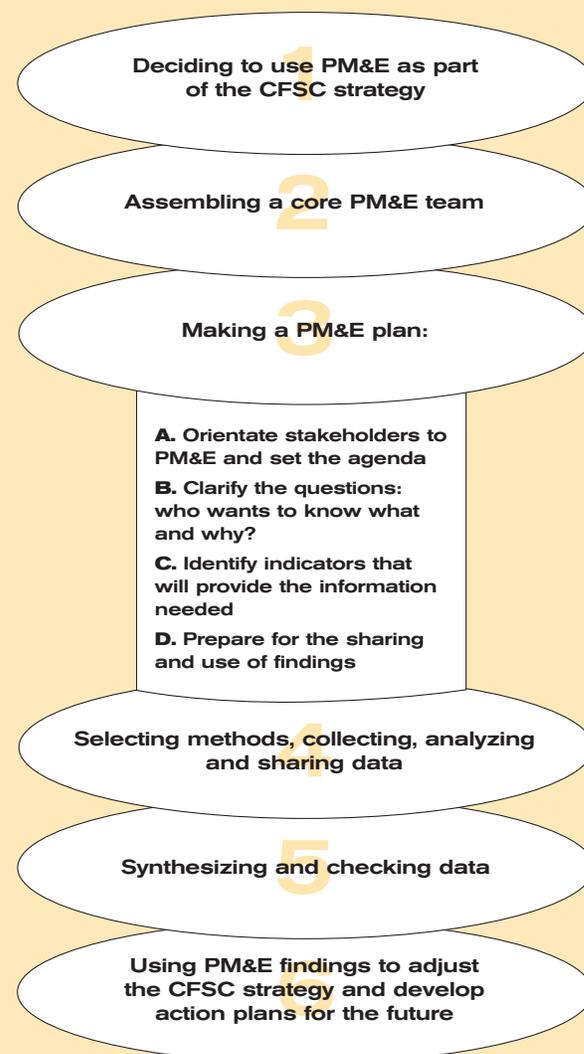
### 1 What will help us to monitor and evaluate CFSC in a participatory way?

- Understanding of—and commitment to—a CFSC approach
- High levels of trust, mutual respect and honesty
- Flexibility, openness and creativity
- Dedicated resources and appreciation that PM&E demands time and other resources
- A group of key dialogue members, including funding organization and community representatives, who understand and support the process
- An evaluation team committed to participation, with faith in the process
- Recognition that capacity building lies at the heart of CFSC and PM&E
- Committed and able external facilitators willing to share experience, knowledge, learning and power
- The group's willingness to assume responsibilities, tackle important issues, acknowledge and engage with power differentials
- Necessary expertise and mechanisms to ensure quality and rigor throughout the process
- Evidence that key participants have thought about what they would like to learn from the evaluation
- Supportive, non-hierarchical organisational cultures that are open to participation, genuine dialogue and risk taking
- A receptive external context; supportive, open and democratic.

### 2 How should we proceed?

Like any participatory approach, it is neither possible nor desirable to develop a universal framework for PM&E. What is to be monitored and evaluated, when, by whom and why, will vary. The PM&E process can be described as a "spiral of key learning moments," in which the stages are not linear but involve to-ing and fro-ing, to progress to a new point (see Box 3 below). The stages overlap but are presented this way for clarity.

#### BOX 3: KEY STAGES OF PM&E FOR CFSC



An essential feature of this spiral is continuous reflection on what is being monitored and evaluated, how, by whom, where the process is leading, and the lessons being learned. Each stage is an intense learning experience. The final stage (using PM&E findings) usually reveals that original goals have changed, indicators have been modified, and the knowledge, opinions and evaluation skills of stakeholders have been transformed.

Levels of participation along a continuum range from “shallow” consultation (no decision-making control or responsibility), to “deep” participation (meaningful involvement in design, data collection, analysis, reporting, dissemination and use of results). Negotiating *who* should be involved and *how/on what terms*, at each stage, is critical. Key questions include: What is the range of stakeholders participating in each step? How representative are the participants? How meaningful is the “participation” of different stakeholders at each stage?

### Stage 1. Deciding to use Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation

First consider the key strengths of Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (Box 4).

#### BOX 4: KEY STRENGTHS OF PM&E

- Intended beneficiaries play a major role in determining whether an initiative has been successful, how and why, and how it could be improved. In keeping with the aims and underlying values of development initiatives, this makes PM&E the most appropriate form of evaluation.
- Marginalized groups and intended beneficiaries are placed at the centre, with the focus on their voices, which are often missing or neglected in traditional evaluations (equity).
- The communities most involved share ownership of the process, resulting in a greater likelihood of findings being appropriate, sustainable, believed-in and used.
- The learning potential of evaluation is maximized, as capacity development of all participants is central.
- Wider, long-term benefits stretch beyond the project and the M&E process itself. These include the creation of a more sustainable, learning-process oriented M&E system, enhanced communication and better understanding of project goals and impact.
- PM&E provides a collaborative alternative to judgmental, centrally controlled and “policing” conventional evaluations.

✓ **Consider:** Who is initiating the PM&E process and why? What resources are available? What key challenges do you anticipate? Who will coordinate the evaluation? Who should be involved and why? What level of understanding is there of participatory approaches amongst different groups? What are the main information needs of each stakeholder group in relation to the evaluation? What baseline data already exists? How can the PM&E process build on previous work and experience?

#### If you decide to adopt a PM&E approach you will need to:

- Secure broad support and encourage wide participation and ownership as early as possible (create space and facilitate dialogue and collaboration).
- Elicit and clarify different stakeholder expectations of the process.
- Openly discuss the evaluation’s purpose, objectives and underlying values.
- Keep asking who wants to know what and why.
- Use and build on existing information and processes.
- Secure resources including time, people, skills and funding.

### Stage 2. Assembling a core Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation team

It is advisable to establish a lead or core team to co-facilitate, guide and support the process. This will help to ensure quality throughout, making the findings more trustworthy.

✓ **Consider:** Who should and who wants to be a member of the core team? What criteria will you use to select participants? What types of skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes are required to be an effective core team member? What balance of voice, experience and expertise do you need represented on the team? What challenges might participants face (workload, capacity, time/availability, motivation)? Who can commit to longer-term involvement? What incentives might be available for committed core team members? Do people understand the possible risks and benefits of the PM&E process enough to make an *informed decision* about where, when and how they might be involved? How will you identify and meet the training and support needs of core team members?

#### Criteria to select core PM&E team members will include:

- Personal commitment to a collaborative process and to the principles of CFSC and PM&E (implies a degree of knowledge and understanding of participatory approaches, faith in and enthusiasm to participate actively)
- Expertise and experience in a variety of participatory techniques and methodologies

- Leadership skills and attributes (ability to inspire, coordinate data collection and analysis, train and support as required, synthesize and feed back findings)
- Group facilitation skills (understanding of group process, ability to run participatory activities, to deal with group dynamics including tension and conflict, to summarize and be an active listener)
- Strong communication skills and an ability to negotiate and communicate effectively with different stakeholders (including grassroots groups, government and donor agency representatives)
- An ability to adapt, teach and communicate PM&E methodology in a variety of learning contexts
- An ability to work flexibly as a part of a team.

### Stage 3. Planning for PM&E

Careful planning is critical to the success of any evaluation process. It involves bringing different representatives together to articulate their group's concerns and negotiate interests, to determine their monitoring objectives and identify what should be monitored, for whom, and by whom. Some questions key to planning will have been considered earlier when you decided to use a participatory approach to M&E.

 **Consider:** Who will coordinate the evaluation process? To what extent are core team members individually committed to the dialogue process? How is the process based on communication for social change values? How can variations in power and influence among participants (including the core team) be dealt with? How can we secure the meaningful involvement of intended beneficiaries and previously marginalized groups (unheard voices)? What local strengths and resources can be drawn on? What is the role of external/professional evaluators and how much control should this person or team have? How is the training of participants in PM&E to be accomplished and who is best placed to do this? At what stages of the project/programme cycle will PM&E occur? What local/cultural factors will impact on the evaluation process?

The following steps will help you to develop a PM&E plan.

#### Stage 3(a). Orientate participants in PM&E principles and engage them in setting the agenda

People can be oriented to a PM&E process in planning workshops, which might include negotiating the terms of reference for the core PM&E team and for other participants. At this stage, clarify participants' expectations of the process (including their information needs), and what/how they might contribute. You will need to find out about

levels of understanding of participatory approaches in general and, in particular, about CFSC and PM&E. This situational needs assessment should inform initial training and briefings about the approach. It is important to share the results of these discussions across all stakeholder groups.

If planning workshops are not possible, background material can be sent out with questionnaires to elicit what people want from the PM&E exercise. Meetings and group interviews can be arranged to elicit expectations, raise awareness about the process and secure more informed commitment.

 **Also consider:** Are all key stakeholder groups appropriately represented? How will particular groups/individuals participate and at what point/s? How much will/can different groups realistically participate? What might facilitate or inhibit the active involvement of particular stakeholders? What can be done to ensure more meaningful participation? What can be done to secure the commitment of skeptical people (if necessary)?

#### Stage 3(b). Clarify the questions: who wants to know what and why?

Based on the progress of initial workshops and/or interviews, evaluation questions can be clarified during shorter meetings with core team members. The basic questions are: Who wants to know what? Why? Keeping in mind the aims of CFSC and the local context, think of questions that need to be answered.

Do not collect more information than necessary and do not collect information that will not be used! You need to think carefully about the types of questions that will provide the most useful information. For example in relation to a communication strategy:

- i) What difference is your communication strategy making? Does it influence dialogue processes between individuals and between groups in terms of tolerance, respect, social justice and active participation? If so, how? If not, why not?
- ii) Is your communication strategy strengthening individual and community communication capacity, decision-making and action? If so, how? If not, why not?
- iii) Have obstacles to social change been identified? What is being done about them?
- iv) Are CFSC structures, policies, processes and communication tools being developed? What would facilitate their development?
- v) Does your communication strategy enable previously powerless individuals and communities to take control of the means and content of communication, to achieve their own social change goals? If so, how?

Once the team has clarified the questions, develop *PM&E objectives*, or statements of intent. These objectives should be derived from the goals of the CFSC initiative or program – in other words, what CFSC teams aim to achieve in relation to HIV/AIDS or human rights, for example. Objectives begin with phrases like: “To assess...”, “To measure...”, “To monitor...”, or “To evaluate...”.

### **Stage 3(c). Identify indicators that will provide the information needed**

Indicators are approximations of complex processes, events and trends. They can measure the tangible (e.g., service up-take), the intangible (e.g., community empowerment), and the unanticipated (results that were not planned). Ideally indicators are representative. That is, they reveal changes related to a specific phenomenon that is representative of a bigger issue.

Remember that the most important indicators are often not quantifiable. For example, the number of people participating in a social network is relatively unimportant compared to the *quality of relationships and dialogue* within that network. In such instances, qualitative indicators (generally descriptive) provide more meaningful measures.

When PM&E objectives have been negotiated and dialogue about the community’s concerns, goals, challenges (obstacles), and vision of desirable change has taken place, indicators of progress can be identified. Like other development interventions, CFSC requires indicators that are derived from reliable information and analysis, that measure and indicate progress, and that can help adjust and support the process. Crucially, however, in CFSC *indicators must be developed through an empowering process of dialogue and negotiation between key participants*. Indicator choice will depend on *what participants want to assess in their own context*. For example: more open private and public dialogue about HIV/AIDS status, a reduction in HIV/AIDS-related stigma indicated by greater inclusion of those with the disease, or increased uptake of Voluntary Counseling and Testing. In this process, the information needs and expectations of diverse participants and community members are clarified and negotiated. It is important to remember that traditional, hierarchical decision-making processes are typically challenged through dialogue, which involves granting a voice to representatives of less powerful groups. In this way the process itself should reaffirm CFSC values, as well as program goals.

Already developed indicators and indicator sets for measuring social change can provide a useful guide.<sup>2</sup> However, externally-derived indicators should be used to stimulate discussion, rather than direct indicator selection.

<sup>2</sup> See Who Measures Change? Tool 1 (the Indicator sets)

Of particular importance to HIV/AIDS communication teams is the need to develop indicators that measure the processes and outcomes of Communication for Social Change as it is applied to efforts to improve HIV/AIDS prevention and care. This is to be done in a way that prioritises the perceptions, experiences and judgments of intended beneficiaries, in their own terms. This differs from traditional monitoring of HIV/AIDS communication which generally has a narrow focus (specific, targeted interventions or outcomes), which measures effectiveness from a top-down, centralized perspective, and which relies on traditional rather than participatory methods.

CFSC is a long-term process and demonstrating its impact cannot be achieved quickly. However, program staff and policy makers need some immediate data that indicates *the contribution being made*. Therefore *progress toward* long-term social change can be an acceptable measure of effectiveness. For example, increased immunization levels predict decreased child mortality, and increasing numbers of girls in school is often cited as a predictor of economic progress. In communication, intent to change has been used as a predictor of actual change.

### **The process of identifying appropriate indicators involves bringing participants together to:**

1. Reflect on what they want to know and why (their PM&E objectives).
2. Consider what information they already collect: How useful is it? Who is it used by? What is it used for? Who benefits? Who learns what from the process? What is missing?
3. Consider how they collect different types of information at present: Who is involved? How? Should other participants be involved? Should other methods be used?
4. Consider what currently used methods of information exchange and reporting might be appropriate.



#### **Take note of the following:**

- Additional flexibility in identifying indicators is required in participatory initiatives like the application of CFSC to HIV/AIDS work, which involves reaching agreement about development activities and their assessment *through dialogue*. In this process new insights are generated as different partners join in, which highlights the need to continually revise indicators.
- As more groups become involved in the PM&E process there is a greater need for negotiated and context-specific indicators, rather than pre-defined indicators. It is critical, therefore, to be able to facilitate and guide the negotiation of indicators with diverse groups, to reach agreement on a limited number of indicators. This negotiation process should itself reinforce a shared vision of social change.

- In many cases different groups will agree on the same set of indicators. In some, however, multiple sets of indicators may be necessary to address the different information needs of diverse stakeholder groups.

The following questions can stimulate discussion to identify suitable CFSC progress markers, or indicators, to assess the dialogue process itself (Box 5).

#### **BOX 5: SOME COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PM&E QUESTIONS**

Are meeting times and spaces creating opportunities for poor and marginalized people to speak, be heard and contribute to making decisions?

How and where does private and public dialogue take place? In relation to the issues of concern, what increase or other changes have there been in:

- Family discussion?
- Discussion among friends?
- Discussion in community gatherings?
- Problem solving dialogue?
- New ways of sharing relevant information?
- Coverage and discussion in news media?
- Focus and discussion in entertainment media?
- Debate and dialogue in the political process?

Are more people from all community groups involved in dialogue about the issues?

To what extent do participants listen, evaluate information before they use it, challenge rumor and articulate their voice in private and public? Have there been improvements in these areas?

Who is creating and telling the stories around the issues? Is that changing?

What are the cultural norms those stories reveal? Are they changing?

Has the community created more opportunities for its members to discuss other issues?

Are new connections between different groups being established within the community, either through face-to-face encounters or using technology? Are members of the community making their views known to those who hold official power? How? Is this changing?

Are community members connecting with outside allies, communities and groups who support their efforts?

#### **Tips when developing indicators:**

i) Indicators should be relevant and accurate enough for those concerned to interpret the information. They do not need to be perfect.

ii) Indicators can take different formats depending on the particular context. For example pictures and stories, the meanings of which can be checked with communities later on.

iii) Learn from developments elsewhere, including creative alternatives to short-term indicators. For example, monitoring significant and sometimes unexpected events associated with long-term development goals. See the “Most Significant Change” methodology described in Box 6.

iv) “Less is more.” It is better to identify fewer indicators that are meaningful and useful, than a long list that is too challenging and not realistic.

#### **BOX 6: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE<sup>3</sup>**

The Most Significant Change methodology involves all stakeholders in deciding what kinds of change to record. *It uses stories to identify the impact of the intervention.* It is systematic because the same questions are asked of everyone, producing stories that are rigorously and regularly collected and become the subject of collective analysis, discussion, filtering, verification and documentation.

##### **Why use the Most Significant Change approach?**

- To develop a wider and deeper understanding of what an initiative is and is not achieving and use this to inform positive change.
- To create space for the voices of key stakeholders to be heard and promoted.
- To clarify the project’s aims.
- To enable participants to reflect on and make sense of complex change.
- Participants collaboratively explore and share their values and priorities in identifying significant change.
- Dialogue and communication processes within organizations are strengthened.

##### **Why apply the Most Significant Change approach to Communication for Social Change?**

- To move towards better understanding between different dialogue members about what is occurring for individual members of the community.
- To explore and share the values and preferences of those involved.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

## BOX 6: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE (cont'd)

- To gain a clearer understanding (as a group) of what *is* and *is not* being achieved by the initiative and to clarify what dialogue members are trying to achieve, so the project can move towards what is desirable and away from what is undesirable.

### The Most Significant Change approach involves three key stages:

1. Establishing domains (areas) of interest through a participatory process. At the CFSC initiative level these might include “changes in community communication capacity.”
2. Setting up a process to collect and review stories of change. Stories can be generated through a simple question, for example: “During the last month, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in the lives of people participating in the project?” In review meetings key stakeholders select the stories they think represent the most significant accounts of change, clarifying the criteria they use to select stories. The monitoring system involves extensive dialogue throughout the community’s networks.
3. Secondary analysis of stories and monitoring the process. This can enhance understanding of impact, shared vision and skill in conceptualizing and capturing impact and in using emergent suggestions (findings).

## Stage 3(d). Prepare to share and use the findings

If the findings are not shared with all participants, they lose their value in the CFSC process. Planning for this involves identifying the key audiences and the best ways to share findings with them. Consider existing and new opportunities for information sharing; how will you document the findings and what can you do to ensure that dissemination is effective?

**?** **Ask:** Who are the key audiences? What are the implications in terms of appropriate reporting formats? What existing opportunities for information sharing could be exploited? What challenges might you face in efforts to share findings with particular groups within the community? How will you cater to the needs, characteristics (capacity, social status, age, literacy levels etc.) and expectations of diverse groups? What can you do to help ensure that the findings will be used productively?

**✓** **Also consider:** What is being learned through the PM&E process? What is proving most challenging? What opportunities could be created for participants to come together, reflect on and learn from the process?

What factors are supporting the process and what are hindering it? What are we learning about different stakeholder groups?

## Stage 4. Selecting methods, collecting and analyzing data

Many methods used in PM&E come from participatory research and learning methodologies, like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). These include a range of audiovisual, interviewing and group-work methods. They also include quantitative methods like community surveys, adapted and made more accessible to local people. Other methods include oral testimonies and direct observation, visual tools (charts, maps, calendars, timelines, murals, photovoice – cameras, video) and dramatic forms (story telling, songs, dances, sculptures, role plays) of data collection. More standard methods include diaries, case studies, focus group discussions, workshops, and documentary analysis.<sup>4</sup>

### Core PM&E team members should facilitate discussion on data collection. Consider the following:

- Local and cultural strengths relating to communication: What methods are common and “traditional” in this area? Who do they involve? How? Are any groups excluded? What methods could be used or adapted for PM&E purposes?
- The kinds of information (data) that particular indicators require.
- The best ways of obtaining this data: How and involving whom? What method/s can provide the necessary information in the time available? Who should do what? How can you make the best use of existing opportunities for data collection and analysis (for example meetings already planned, mothers waiting at clinics etc.).
- Existing resources (expertise, time, transport/accessibility, support, funding etc.).
- The type, number and location of data collection sites, what sampling process is appropriate (random or selected “key informants”), the characteristics and numbers of people to be involved, how they will be involved.
- How to adapt particular methods to levels of ability.
- Training and support needs relating to the use of particular methods.
- The cultural appropriateness of particular methods.
- The best ways to document findings over a period of time (see below).
- How particular methods might facilitate learning.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Who Measures Change? Tool 2* (Data collection techniques)

- Resource implications: Do budgetary, expertise (support), time or other constraints make some methods impossible?
- Possible barriers to participation, e.g., command of language, social class, levels of literacy, physical challenges, age, and time constraints.

Once you have selected an initial set of methods, consider how data collection will be coordinated and managed. Who will collect what data? How? When? Where? How can you ensure that you only collect information that will be used? How will you cross-check (triangulate) data? That is, how will you know that your “findings” are trustworthy and reliable? How will you decide when to stop collecting data?

PM&E processes used to assess CFSC data collection never really finish but become more or less intense over time. Data collection can take weeks, months or years. However, when *no new answers* are being recorded and *no new insights* are being generated through data analysis, data collection can stop for the time being. Data analysis is discussed further below.

 **Tip:** In general, “less is more;” it is better to collect less data and actually use it than to collect data you do not use. Keep asking why particular information is needed and by whom. Regularly review data collection methods and processes, which sometimes need to be adapted.

 **Data analysis** or “making sense of the data” is challenging and often benefits from expert input and guidance. It is important not to focus on data collection at the expense of analysis! You are strongly recommended to *analyze the data as you collect it*, because analysis often inspires new questions that require further data collection. Importantly, this keeps the process alive, relevant and responsive. That is why this guide emphasizes analysis in two stages of the PM&E process.

 **Documentation** takes place over time, while the data is being collected and analysed. The following questions will help to ensure that documentation is of a high quality and will be trustworthy and useful: Who will coordinate documentation? Which participants are responsible for documenting what? How? (e.g. pictures, stories and photographs may be appropriate) Why and for whom? What support do they need and where will this come from? How can you make sure that what is being documented accurately reflects the process and findings (i.e. that it is valid)? How can you make sure that things are recorded in ways consistent with CFSC and PM&E core principles and values? How can you learn from experience of documentation?

## Stage 5. Analyzing, synthesizing and checking the data

How participants actually use the information generated through a PM&E process to make decisions and inform future action is critical. Effective data analysis and synthesis is a crucial step and an important learning experience.

Analysis of data needs to fit with the aims of the PM&E exercise. It is a demanding task that requires careful thought, technical expertise and effective training and support. Data analysis generally involves identifying and organizing the material under key themes or categories, and synthesizing (summarizing) the key points in each category. If you have asked open questions, selecting representative direct quotes (in respondents’ own words) can be valuable.

 **Consider:** How will the data be analyzed? Who will be involved? How will you ensure that data analysis is of a high quality? Who is best placed to coordinate, facilitate and support this process? How could you cross-check (triangulate) data? That is, how will you know that the “findings” are accurate? How will you document the findings? How will you use the findings to inform further data collection, as appropriate? What will you do with findings that are unexpected or seem to be undesirable? Who will have access to what information? Are there issues of confidentiality to consider?

When data analysis is in progress think about the following: How do you know what you are claiming to know? What main points and themes are emerging? Who has identified these and how? How representative are your “findings” and any direct quotes cited? How are you recording unexpected issues, or points that do not sit easily with the general findings? Are there any surprises and what are they? What should you do with this information? Are there any sensitivities that impact on who you can share particular findings with and how (issues of confidentiality for example)? These questions highlight the learning potential of data analysis.

## Stage 6. Making use of the PM&E findings

This stage is an important means of disseminating findings, learning from the process and learning from others’ experiences. Core team members should seek agreement with participants on how the findings might be used, by whom and for whose benefit.

Meetings involving different participant groups can be organized to stimulate deeper understanding of the impact of efforts, critical reflection and dialogue on achievements and weaknesses, and constructive action on the basis of what has been learned. Workshops, meetings, photographs,

video footage and the distribution of briefs and/or reports (as appropriate) are some ways of feeding back and validating findings. Different documents and media may be required to share the PM&E findings with diverse participant groups. Ways of following up work to date should be discussed. Core PM&E teams should also clarify whether the PM&E process needs to be sustained and, if so, how.

## Conclusion

The measurement of CFSC approaches remains challenging and presents significant opportunities for dialogue and for learning, within and between communities. Thank you for your work in social change and thank you for taking the time to use this guide. Please send us your questions and comments and, most importantly, please share with us and with others what you and your communities have learned from the process.

The Consortium's work on participatory monitoring and evaluation is supported with funds from the Department for International Development, of the United Kingdom.

We encourage broad use of this document, and the other PM&E publications for educational and nonprofit use. Please share your stories and feedback via email:

[info@communicationforsocialchange.org](mailto:info@communicationforsocialchange.org).

**For a more comprehensive and deeper discussion of PM&E in relation to CFSC, readers are directed to the Communication for Social Change Consortium publication "Who Measures Change? An Introduction to Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of Communication for Social Change" by Will Parks et al (2005), from which this shorter version has been produced.**

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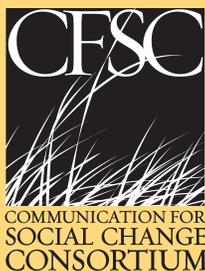
## KEY WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CFSC AND ON PM&E

<http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org>

<http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/outcome.html>

<http://www.mande.co.uk>





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