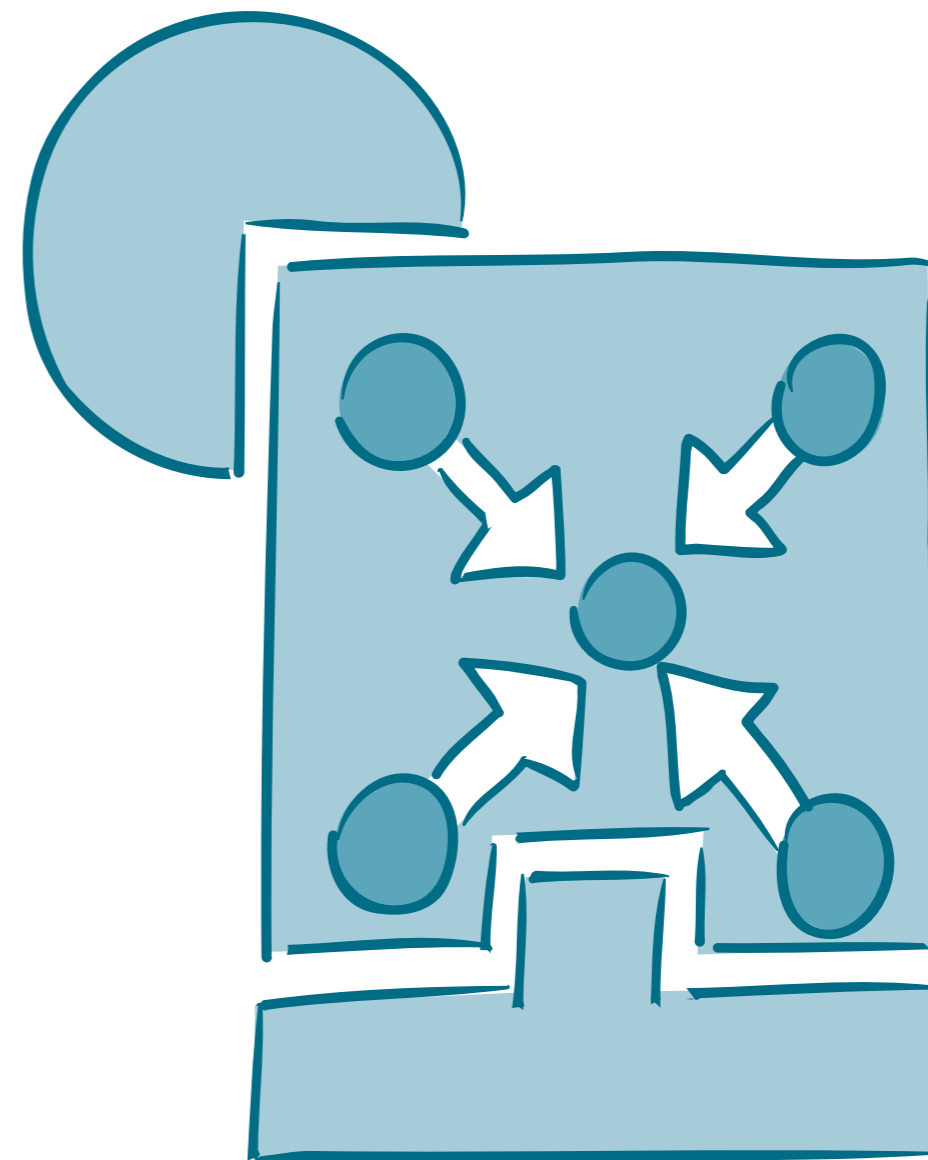
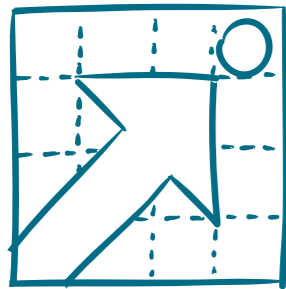


Key questions and indicators

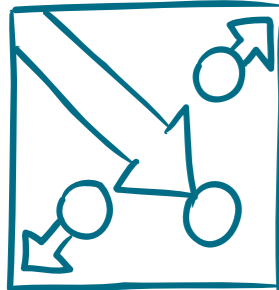


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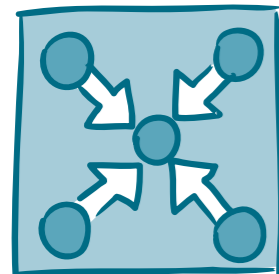
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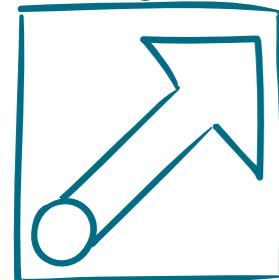
Planning



Evaluation



Monitoring



Transference into action

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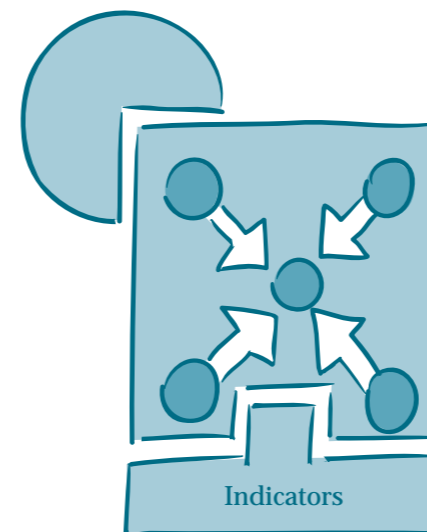
Introduction

At the center of the planning and monitoring process lies the establishment of objectives and indicators as a joint effort between all persons involved. The importance of this statement has been experienced repeatedly by all the participants in the preparation of this brochure: depending on the constellation of partners and the perspectives represented, different key questions were asked, different indicators established, previously formulated goals had to be questioned again.

This brochure is part of the PEMT concept (Planning, Evaluation, Monitoring, Transference into action). Key questions and indicators are key elements of the monitoring process. Linking planning to monitoring, and objectives to key questions and indicators, respectively, facilitates the establishment of realistic and precise objectives considerably. Blind spots and implicit intentions are revealed and can be discussed.

This brochure does not deal with the synthetic indicators used to identify national trends. Nor does it contain any lists of indicators from which a number of seemingly appropriate ones can be selected. Rather, it tries to encourage the actors in international cooperation projects and programmes to team up with their partners to ask the key questions essential to their common purpose and to establish their own indicators.

Key questions and indicators allow us to filter out what is relevant to our work from an endless stream of information. They allow us to deliberately select a fraction of the whole; for this is the only way we can, with reasonable effort and in timely fashion, extract the information needed for steering decisions in our own area of work. Selecting also means gaining a better understanding of the reality in which the partners involved live, and agreeing on how to interpret rising prices for the hairdresser or for construction timber, for example.



2. A path to key questions and indicators

The path suggested here to formulating key questions and to forming indicators is built on a variety of constituents, which have been developed in other PEMT publications. In the illustration below, these con-

stituents as well as the new elements are described and put into context. The illustration is developed further from the Monitoring Matrix (cf. brochure *Monitoring – keeping in touch with reality*).

1. Objectives

are negotiated by the partners at the beginning of an undertaking (project or programme). Ideally, the development of the monitoring concept is done concurrently. A monitoring to be introduced later in the process needs to be determined jointly by the partners as well, including fields of observation and, if necessary, key questions and indicators. This leads to analyzing and adapting those objectives formulated during the planning phase, now further removed from the current reality.



Overall goals are derived from guidelines, strategic principles, national development plans, etc.

2. Fields of observation

are chosen by the partners jointly while the monitoring concept is set up (during planning or later). The development of the topics should be observed systematically.

Target: an ambitious and yet realistic fixed point on a scale which needs to be reached.

Results: planned or unplanned output of a project (as the total of project activities).

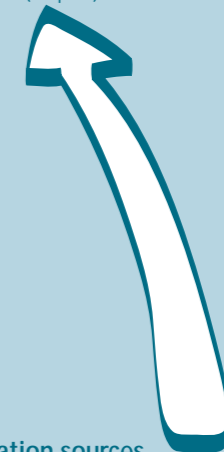
Processes: furthering or hindering events in view of the results to be achieved in a joint undertaking.

Impact: comprises desired and undesired effects of a project, which go beyond the expected results (generally at the "overall goal" level).

Context: comprises that which lies outside of a project's area of influence, but can influence the course of a project positively or negatively.

Objectives	Overall goals			
	Fields of observation (FO)	Key questions to FO	Indicators	Information sources
Results	Target			
Processes	Target			
Impact				
Context				

Certain steps in this process often become superfluous: if a result can be recorded in the form of a directly verifiable target, the source of information is all that matters; if the degree to which an objective has been reached can be determined through a key question, no indicators are needed (cf. p. 9).



5. Information sources

are those people or documents that provide direct answers to key questions, or information or data which make up the indicators, respectively.

4. Indicators

select a concrete, verifiable dimension from a complex, not directly answerable key question.



3. Key questions to the fields of observation

become a necessity if the results and processes, or impact and context, respectively, cannot be recorded directly. At higher levels of organization, key questions often turn out to be different from the ones at the project level. In cases where key questions do not give a clear indication about the degree to which the objective has been reached, indicators can be helpful.



3. First example: natural resource management

Use of resources and diverse social groups in a communal forestry project

Sustained use of a shared resource such as a community forest requires close collaboration between all users from the time when the objectives are established to the monitoring of the use. It is essential that the various demands of the diverse social groups are carefully balanced. In many mountainous areas of the developing countries households largely depend on forest products such as fodder for their domestic animals or firewood. The task of collecting these products is usually performed by women and girls, possibly keeping the latter from going to school. The men, however, usually take care of cash crops such as construction timber, which can be sold in town (and creates proceeds that can be invested in village and households, if needed).

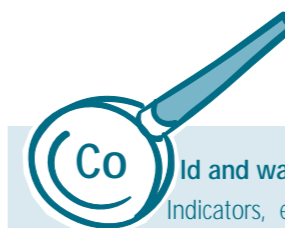
Overall goals

Objectives	The community forest should produce fodder, firewood, and construction timber. The use of these products has to be regulated in such a way that all the forest yields are maintained over time and that all social groups benefit equally.			
	Fields of observation (FO)	Key questions to FO	Indicators	Information sources
Results	Target 1: Each household can harvest 120 bundles of fodder and 60 bundles of firewood annually	Field of observation directly verifiable		List of bundles per household, which is kept current by the women assigned to the task
	Target 2: The community can harvest 500 m ³ of construction timber annually to sell	Field of observation directly verifiable		Timber list of the forester
Processes	Decision-making process for the assignment of harvesting locations for construction timber (men) and firewood/fodder (women)	Are the efforts put in and the benefits obtained distributed equally between the genders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time invested by women and men Tensions between women and men 	Inquiries made among men and women
	Decision-making process for the assignment of harvesting locations for fodder and firewood among the women	Are the efforts put in and the yields obtained distributed equally among the women?	Satisfaction among all women, regardless of social status	Inquiries among the women
	Distribution of proceeds from the sale of construction timber	Are all households receiving equal portions of the proceeds?		Inquiries made among women and men
Impact	Development of the forest from an ecological point of view	As a whole, is the use of the forest sustainable?	Wood reserve, composition of tree varieties, water availability	Working plan/measurements of source output and duration of water availability
	Socio-economic use from perspective of different people involved	Do all social groups benefit equally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School attendance rate of girls Investments in infrastructure, etc. 	Inquiries
	Nutritional state of the livestock		Milk production of the livestock (according to the social status of the households)	Inquiries among the women
Context	Construction activity in the city	Is the price for timber rising?		Observation of the market development

High prices for construction timber increase the importance of the forest for the men, which can jeopardize the interests of the women and may lead to conflicts.

In our case, after consulting with the forester, the community assembly has decided that, for the time being, each family is entitled to 60 bundles of firewood per annum, and that the use of fodder can be increased to 120 bundles. No more than 500 m³ (654 cubic yards) of construction timber can be felled annually. In order to protect the edge of the forest close to the village, where the women prefer to go, all forest products will have to be harvested from sites distributed over the entire forest.

The goals are to ensure that the forest keeps furnishing its products (fodder, firewood, and construction timber, but also spring water) which, in some instances, compete with each other. In addition, all social groups should equally benefit from the new regulation.



Cold and warm information

Indicators, especially quantitative ones, are considered "cold" information: measurable, objective, uninfluenced by emotion. Only when these figures are being interpreted, i.e. only when they come into contact with the "warmth" of the experience of all persons involved, do they unfold their information potential. The explanation for rising tensions between women and men, and an increasing number of arguments over the various forest products can, at best, be found in the experience that, with rising prices for construction timber, the men try to expand their use of the forest, which can reduce the yields of other products and thus affect the women.

Gender as an example for differing interests

Indicators have to help distinguish between varying points of view. The interests of women and men are as different as the interests of people of varying social strata, or the ones of city people and country folk. A project in which results and processes are distinguished through key questions and indicators capable of reflecting the diverse interests, will develop differently from one in which this is not the case.

4. More about indicators and targets

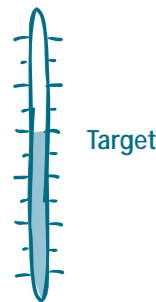
Indicators

- are changing characteristics whose distinction or proportion is determinable, and which give visible indications of changed situations and show the position in regard to the objectives established;
- depend from the respective objectives and key questions;
- can contribute considerably to the formulation of clear objectives by reflecting back on the establishment of the targets and the formulation of the key questions;
- are, like targets and key questions, to be established by the partners in a process of mutual communication; a different constellation of people involved can lead to different indicators, accordingly.

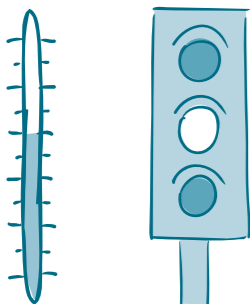
Target and threshold value

An ambitious and yet realistic fixed value which is to be reached in the fields of observation pertaining to results and processes. It can be represented on a scale in the form of a fixed value (120 bundles of fodder, 500 m³ of construction timber).

It is also possible to establish a certain target as a threshold value; if the results surpass or fall short of the threshold value, an intervention on the part of the project or programme is triggered (“traffic lights”). This procedure is especially suited for fields of observation in the context.



Target



Threshold value

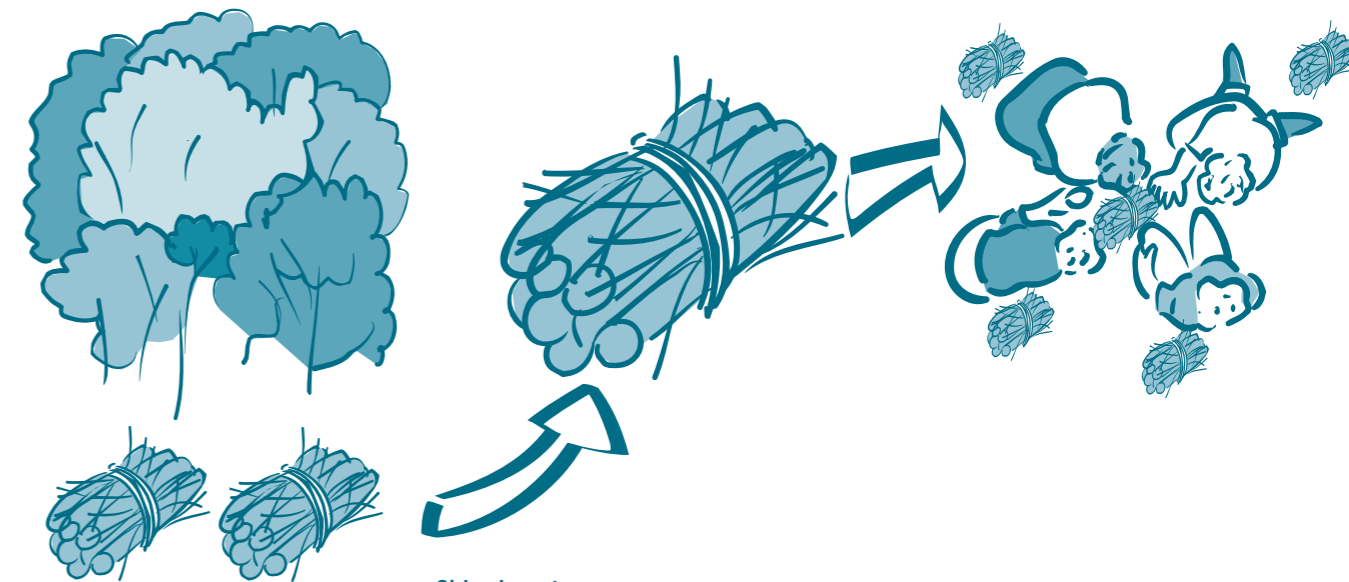


To ensure that steering decisions are adequate, key questions and indicators need to be differentiated according to organization levels. At the project level, emphasis is put mainly on results and processes, while, at the higher levels of organization, the interest is mainly focused on information about impact and context.

5. Focusing, skipping steps

Selecting, focusing

We cannot observe everything that is important for reaching the goals of our undertakings. Selecting fields of observation, formulating key questions, and choosing indicators are elements of the focusing process. Its purpose is to help us filter out, with reasonable effort, that which is essential from the flood of information.



Skipping steps

Certain steps of the procedure chosen here often become superfluous: if a result can be measured in form of a directly verifiable target, the source of information is the only element of interest left; if the degree to which a target has been reached can be registered through a key question, no indicators are needed – in this case as well, we can go directly to the source of information.

Objectives	Fields of observation	Key questions to FO	Indicators	Information sources
	Directly verifiable target?	yes no		
		Degree to which goal is reached directly measurable through key question?	yes no	
			Reduction of key question to verifiable dimension	

6. Second example: repatriation of refugees...

...to illustrate quantitative and qualitative aspects

The humanitarian aid of the Swiss government, through contributions to the UNHCR*, supports refugee programmes during crises as well as programmes for repatriation of refugees after conflicts worldwide. According to the UNHCR Convention of 1951, repatriations of refugees have to take place voluntarily as well as in dignity and safety. Therefore, in order to check the success of repatriation programmes, more than the mere number of repatriated refugees is necessary. Equally as important is information on the quality of the repatriations, such as voluntariness, dignity, and safety.

* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Overall goals				
Objectives	The repatriation of 10,000 families is accomplished by a certain date, in accordance with UNHCR principles (voluntariness, safety, and dignity).			
	Fields of observation (FO)	Key questions to FO	Indicators	Information sources
Results	Target 1: Until point X in time, 10,000 refugee families have arrived in their homeland	Field of observation directly observable?		Report of the UNHCR
	Target 2: The dignity of the repatriates was respected	Reactions of the repatriates?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiries among the repatriates • Inquiries among the organizations in charge of the repatriation • Media reports
	Target 3: The refugees have returned voluntarily	How do the repatriates judge the situation before returning to their homeland?		Inquiries among the refugees willing to return before, and among the refugees who have returned after the repatriation
Processes	Safety while returning	Are there any incidents to be expected?		Assessment of the situation by the organizations in charge before/during the execution
Impact	Return of trained people	Are the public infrastructures (health care, education, administration) working again?	Accessibility of services to the entire population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports of health care professionals on location • Reports of relief organizations on location
Context	Context 1: Situation concerning safety in the homeland	What is the atmosphere like, compared to the time when the families fled?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians' choice of words • Harassment of repatriates • Acceptance of the repatriates in their villages 	Situation reports of national and international institutions, media reports
	Context 2: Stability of peace	Are the signs of conflict disappearing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of demobilization • Special edicts such as curfews, etc. • Political and war prisoners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media reports • Reports of relief organizations on the spot

Programmes for repatriates usually include, in addition to the actual repatriation, initial help with the social and professional reintegration in the homeland. With that, the job of the Humanitarian Aid normally ends. After the task has been completed, however, the Humanitarian Aid continues to monitor the impact and context, which are important for the future development in the area and for the next planning steps. Central for the Humanitarian Aid is, for example, the question whether the context has improved to the point where organizations of developmental cooperation can resume their work.



Quantity and quality

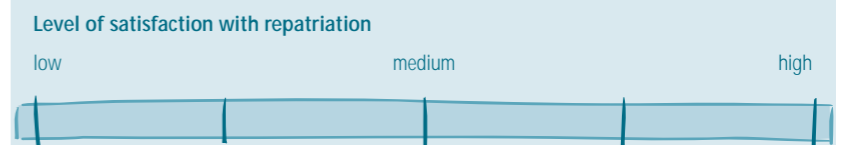
The fact that the refugees have arrived by itself does not give us enough information about the success of the undertaking. In order to determine that, we need answers to questions about the course of the repatriation. "Voluntariness", "dignity", and "safety" are very complex qualities. The voluntariness of a person's returning home also depends, for example, on how safe the situation is in the refugee camps. Depending on that, refugees may be more likely to return home, even though the safety situation in their homeland may still be very precarious.

Quantitative indicators

help provide reliable pieces of information, which can be placed in a row and compared (as long as the indicator is the same). They indicate the changes achieved from one recording time to the next.

Qualitative indicators

inform on estimations, valuations, and opinions. They reflect a personal view of the people asked, about the level of satisfaction with the course of their journey home, for example. The information content of qualitative indicators is often more direct and comprehensive than the one derived from quantitative indicators. It can be useful to quantify qualitative indicators and to reproduce them on scales as measurable quantities:



7. Key questions and indicators in the project cycle

While working on this brochure, we made the important realization that there is a close connection between objectives, fields of observation, key questions, and indicators, that these elements mutually influence each other, respectively; indicators, for example, have repercussions on the formulation of objectives and the establishment of targets. Compared with the brochure *Monitoring – keeping in touch with reality*, the M (monitoring), therefore, is now considerably closer to the P (planning).

Introduction on the occasion of the planning process

Key questions and indicators are elements of the monitoring process. Ideally, the latter is worked out right at the beginning of an undertaking. The formulation of key questions and the determination of indicators, if needed, contribute considerably to a formulation of objectives without contradictions, accepted by all persons involved.



Establishing the

- Objectives
- Fields of observation
- Key questions
- Indicators

Later provision

The more time passes between the planning and the monitoring phases, the more removed the objectives laid down in the past become from the current reality. For this reason, the objectives need to be reanalyzed in a first step and adjusted, if necessary.



Analyzing/Adjusting the

- Objectives
- Establishing the
- Fields of observation
 - Key questions
 - Indicators

P Planning
M Monitoring
T Transference into action
EE External Evaluation
SE Self-Evaluation

8. Step by step to key questions and indicators

1. Establishing or analyzing objectives, selecting fields of observation

In a first step, the objectives have to be established or analyzed, respectively: do the objectives established during the planning phase still correspond with the present reality? Do they need to be newly formulated? Are they defined in regard to location, time, and degree to which they are to be reached?

2. Formulating key questions, determining indicators

Key questions become necessary whenever fields of observation are not directly verifiable. If key questions cannot be answered directly themselves, indicators can help.

3. Establishing methodical aspects

At what point in time and in what intervals does information need to be collected? What are the information sources? How precise and comprehensive does the information need to be? Are the key questions and indicators adequate for the respective hierarchic level, i.e. can they satisfy the need for information of the organization level for which they are intended?

4. Testing indicators

Do the indicators fulfill the requirements (cf. page 16)? How are they best presented, and how communicated to the decision-makers? These questions can only be answered through appropriate tests. Tests also reveal overlaps or major gaps between indicators.



To keep in mind continually: procedure and effort

- Can we draw experience from similar, previous undertakings?
- Can indicators proven to have worked in the past be taken over?
- Can the information desired be collected in time given?
- Who needs to be involved in conception, collecting and interpretation of data?
- How much time and energy can the persons involved invest?
- What (technical) means are necessary, and are they available?
- Is the topic so complex, are the characteristics so difficult to determine, that specially trained people are needed?
- What is needed and what is available as far as money and materials are concerned?
- Is the effort in proportion with the benefit?

9. Third example: context monitoring

Context monitoring of a Country Programme

In a Country Programme it is determined, among other things, in which sectors the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation) wants to be active for the medium term. In our example, it is technical education, small scale enterprise promotion, and agriculture. The targets of the sectors can only be reached in a favourable context, i.e. if the decentralization initiated by the partner country continues and the central state grants its districts and communities more autonomy. Another development considered beneficial is, if, over

Overall goals				
Objectives	On the national level, trends which directly influence the objectives laid down in the country programme have to be recorded over a longer period of time, with relatively little effort. In addition, threshold values have to be established; as soon as they are over-stepped the monitoring needs to be intensified.			
	Fields of observation (FO)	Key questions to FO	Indicators	Information sources
Results				
Processes				
Impact				
Context	Decentralization Central state – districts – communities	Is the reflux of means from the central state to the districts and communities increasing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of fiscal income flowing from the central government to the districts; threshold value: less than 30% of the state budget • % of fiscal income flowing from the districts to the communities; threshold value: less than 2% of the state budget • Infrastructural projects at district and village levels 	State, district, and community budgets Figures from local authorities
	Distribution of tasks and roles between Government and civil society	How are professional and employers' associations as well as trade unions developing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership figures; threshold value: growth rate decreasing • How are the law-making and -enforcing processes developing? 	Annual reports from associations Media reports

time, segments of the civil society such as employers' and professional associations as well as trade unions become more active and are allowed to have a voice.

Therefore, changes in the context outlined should be monitored at the national level routinely, yet with sufficient exactness. In addition, a threshold value which functions as a traffic light is built in: if the light changes, i.e. if the threshold value is either over- or under-stepped, additional effort needs to be put into collecting more differentiated information in the area in question. Depending on the findings, sectorial targets may have to be revised as a consequence.

We are not only talking about monitoring the targets of the Country Programme here, but about monitoring the context; this explains the limitation in the fields of observation. Also, we are consciously using information sources that are commonly accessible.



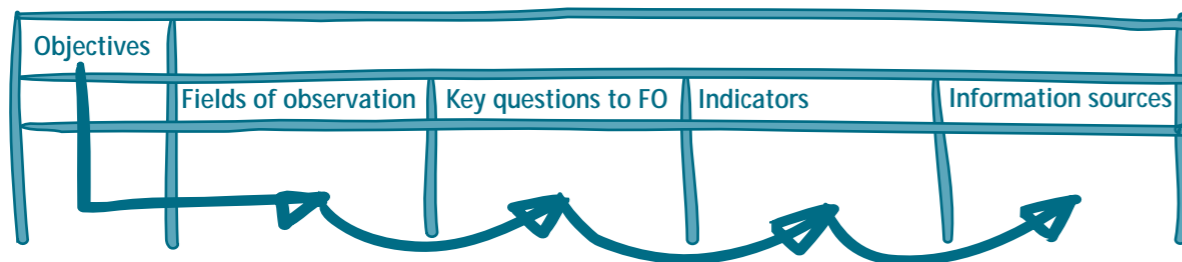
Flexibility versus continuity

The changes in the reality and context of a project force us to re-analyze our goals periodically. When they change, new key questions and indicators may become necessary as well. However, long-term trends can only be recorded through continued observation with the same indicators. If we do not want to lose any information, especially in the areas of impact and context, we may have to continue to observe the old key questions and indicators along with the new ones.

10. Requirements to be met by indicators

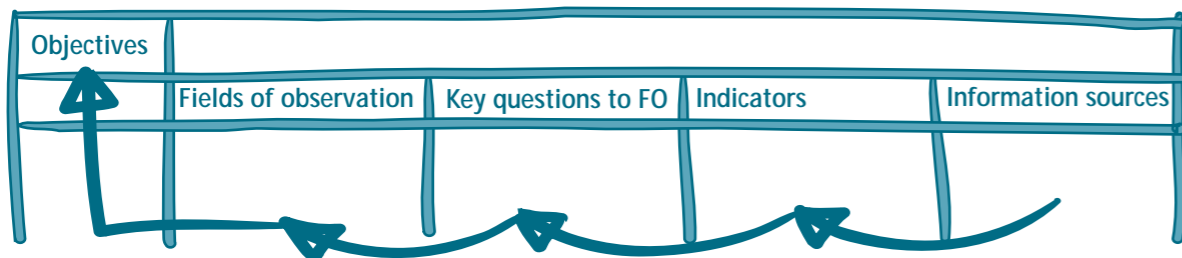
Relevance

Following the sequence formulation of objectives – fields of observation – key questions (cf. p. 13) the partners agree on the indicator. The sequence represents a facet of reality as the persons involved experience it. This facet has to be connected in a plausible way with the formulation of the objectives in order to be relevant.



- Does the indicator measure what needs to be measured?
- By simplifying, do we really record what is important?
- Is the indicator suitable for the specific situation?

Whether an indicator is relevant and sound can be judged by going backwards, i.e. from the indicator via key question and field of observation to the objectives.



- Is there a plausible connection between indicator and field of observation?
- Is there a direct connection between the changes to be recorded and the objectives of the undertaking? Can the changes be attributed to the influence of the undertaking?

Sensitivity

Indicators should reveal differences, be it between two points in time or between differing situations (spatial, social, time-related, etc.), and they should facilitate the decision-making process.

- Is the indicator sensitive enough to register relevant changes?
- Do differences become noticeable at all in the period of time allowed between two collections of data?

Reliability

A reliable indicator has to be ascertainable in differing situations, by different people, and show the same results.

- Is the indicator defined clearly, to the point where everybody records the same data?
- Do the people recording the data agree on the recording method?
- Is the indicator applicable in various situations and independent from the use of means?

Overall goals	Information sources				
	Indicators				
	Key questions to FO				
	Fields of observation (FO)				
Objectives	Results	Processes	Impact	Context	

List of PEMT working instruments

- Monitoring – keeping in touch with reality (1997/77 pages)
- Getting to know PEMT (1996/30 pages)
- Cooperation Planning (1992/65 pages)
- Mirror, mirror on the wall... (Self-Evaluation) (1990/70 pages)
- Manual on Self-Evaluation (1995/100 pages)
- External Evaluation in Development Cooperation (1990/40 pages)
- Sustainability of Development Projects (1990/30 pages)
- SWPO (KEK/CDC) (folder, 4 pages)
- Planning Pre-Phases (in collaboration with Intercooperation) (1995/36 pages)*
- Participatory Rural Appraisal – PRA** (1997/7 pages)

* available in English only

** available in English and Spanish only