ASK Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

Abbreviations

CSOs   Civil Society Organizations

DAC   Development Assistance Committee

INGOs   International Non-Governmental Organizations

M&E: Monitoring & Evaluation

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

OECD   Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SP   Strategic Plan

TBD   To Be determined

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1 Welcome

ASK Established with the goal of providing organizations and governments with the highest quality data collection and analysis tools needed to understand their environment and impact. We create high-impact knowledge to catalyze efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in the public domain. ASK Consulting was established by a group of committed experts, who are well equipped with national and international experience to provide consulting services in various areas including Project Management, Educational Advisory Services, Monitoring and Evaluation, Statistics, Research and Development, Capacity Building, and Business Management. Brain Box, APEX Pakistan, Result Seekers and OBP-UK who are ASK's international partners provide backstopping and technical support which is meant to enhance credibility, validity and acceptability of the research and evaluation findings.

Our management team consists of well-educated nationals and internationals with strong understanding of international best practices, as well as local knowledge of the country. The combination of our international knowledge and local experience make our firm a qualified partner for both local and international organizations. Our main clients are public and private organizations, national and international NGOs, political missions, UN agencies and not for profit organizations.

ASK Consulting holds a vision to empower businesses, industries and public institutions by enabling them to draw meaningful inferences from data and therefore focuses on statistics, monitoring and evaluation, project management, research and capacity building. It provides timely, reliable and accurate consultancy services and trainings on these topics by following international standards for research activities and sticks to its principles of respecting human rights, cultural diversity, protection of environment and gender equality at all times.

1.1 Our Company History

ASK comprises more than 300 professionals who are recognized for their technical excellence. ASK staff represent a range of backgrounds and expertise. This includes PhD and Master-level researchers, evaluators and a wide variety of senior and junior staff with advanced degrees in education and TVET, public health, business administration, health administration, public policy, economics, management, and epidemiology.

1.2 What We Do at ASK Consulting we provide the following products and services to our clients:

- Compliance and Risk services
- Research and assessments
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Business Advisory services
- Capacity Building
- Reporting

1.3 Our mission, vision and values

supporting government, non-profit and civil society organizations, academia, funders and corporate social investment departments in a variety sectors to meet critical global development challenges.

1.4 Mission Statement:

ASK Consulting's mission is to help our clients build and develop sustainable, and adopt the quality while implementing the projects.

1.5 Vision Statement:

Our aim is to be:

- Known for high quality outcomes
- Known for growth strategies

1.6   Introduction to the M&E Plan

The M&E plan will help ASK Training and Consulting to track and assess the results of clients' project activities. It is also a fundamental document that ASK Training and Consulting follows whether the projects / programs being assessed meeting the stated objectives/ goals. The M&E plan helps guide our evaluation activities. The M&E plan together with the proposed data collection forms, will allow ASK managers to determine whether or not an activity is making progress toward its intended results.

1.7   Institutional Capacity

ASK Training and Consulting was established by a group of committed experts, who are well equipped with national and international experience to provide consulting services in various areas including Project Management, Educational Advisory Services, Monitoring and Evaluation, Statistics, Research and Development, Capacity Building, and Business Management.

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1.8   ASK's Expertise

ASK's expertise extends from statistics in both qualitative and quantitative research processes (socio-economic, demographics, migration, health, disaster risk reduction, nutrition, education monitoring and evaluation, impact assessment, market and feasibility research, finance, education, labor market and agriculture) to project management, geographical information systems and remote sensing applications.

1.9   ASK's Technical Capacity

ASK Consulting has significant experience in development and implementation of household surveys. The company has in-house expertise relating to the development of statistical survey methodology, data analysis and GIS applications.

ASK Consulting teams use tablets and on-line survey data collection methods for data gathering. For that purpose, ASK developed its own survey data collection platform. This platform enables us to monitor the data collection activities daily. In addition to this, it is possible to monitor the initial outcomes of the study as the platform provides real time analytical tools.

Through its own on-line Project Monitoring Platform (PMP) project experts and stakeholders can access real-time information about the progress of the study. The platform also allows us to monitor data quality in real-time and flag anomalies as they arise so they can be checked in the field and remedied immediately.

The team of consultants proposed by Ask Consulting is composed of qualified professionals that include expatriates and Afghans with demonstrable thematic, research, management and country knowledge and experience. Given their wide educational and professional experiences both nationally and internationally, all members have good knowledge of Afghanistan. They will be able to implement the proposed third party monitoring assignments within the scope and parameters of the project and according to interna-

tionally acceptable standards. Together, the proposed teams for this project have worked with small business enterprises and have conducted research, surveys, evaluation and monitoring and project implementation as well as assessment.

1.10   Purpose of the Monitoring & Evaluation Plan

The main objective of the M&E plan is to improve the quality of ASK monitoring and evaluation activities. In other words, the M&E plan help to track and assess the results of the interventions of our clients throughout the life of their programs/projects.

Furthermore, the M&E Plan is expected to:

1.   Ensure the management of program/project in order to deliver the program in an efficient manner.

2.   Assist in collecting data to assess and demonstrate progress made in achieving expected results.

3.   Incorporate the program indicators, baselines targets and their means of verification.

4.   Highlight mechanism for monitoring the achievement of outputs and contribution towards achievement of expected results.

5.   Contribute in increasing the quality and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation actions.

1.11   Key Users of the M&E Plan

The key users of this M&E Plan are ASK clients, projects' beneficiaries, auditors, independent evaluators, international and national partners and other relevant stakeholders.

2   ASK Theory of Change

We use a theory of change to analyze the extent to which the stated objectives have been attained. A Theory of Change (TOC) of a project intervention describes the processes of change by outlining the causal pathways from outputs (goods and services delivered by the project) through direct outcomes (changes resulting from the use of outputs by key stakeholders) through other 'intermediate states' towards impact[1]. A theory of change is often developed during the planning stage but can also be useful for monitoring and evaluation. The theory of change help ASK to: develop better key evaluation questions, identify key indicators for monitoring, identify gaps in available data, prioritize additional data collection, and provide a structure for data analysis and reporting. It allows ASK to select strategies and activities, and hence the planned outputs of which are logically expected to contribute to the ultimate, desired impact.

2.1   Conceptual Framework for Theory of Change
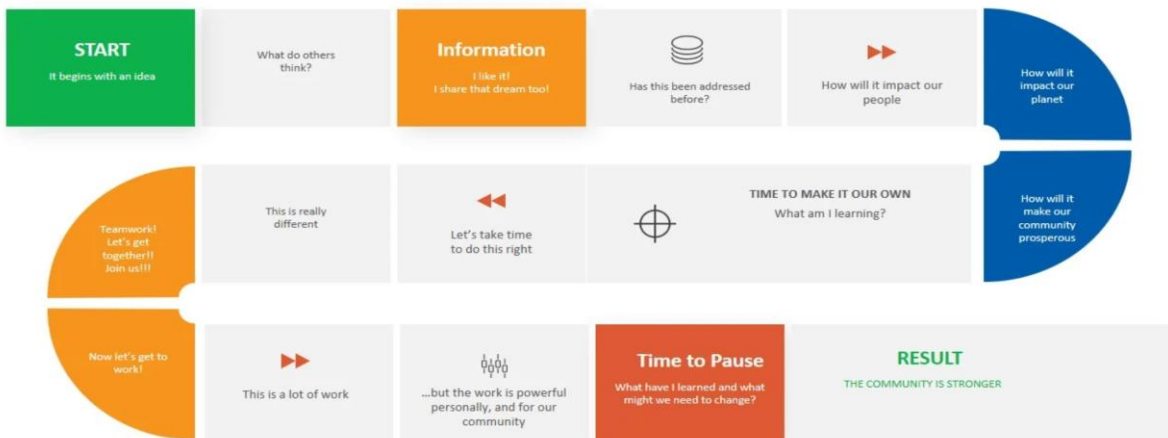
The theory of change used in the framework is thought of as an outcomes-focused planning approach that poses questions such as:

1. What lasting outcome or impact is needed to achieve client goals?
2. What behaviors in our target audiences will indicate the impact has happened?
3. What do target audiences need to know and understand to give their support to the organization?
4. What "experiences" caused by the outputs of activities would contribute to changes in knowledge and understanding?
5. What inputs are necessary to resource activities which will cause the right experiences?

2.2   ASK M&E Processes

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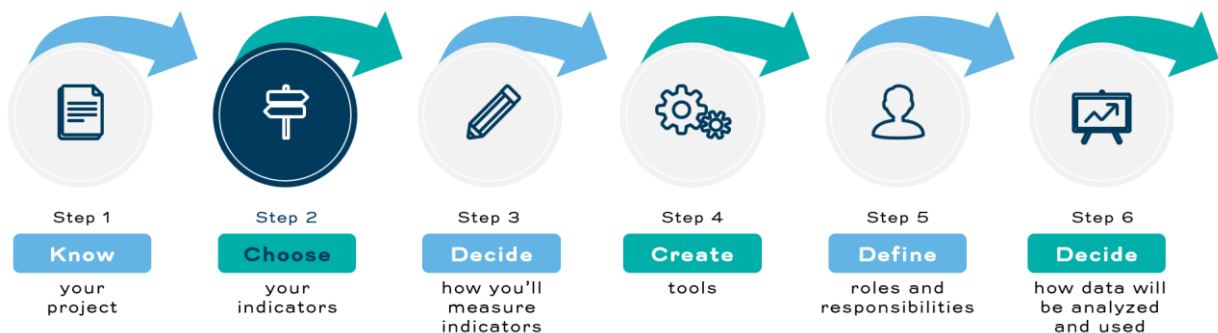
1 The United Nations Development Group (UNDG), https://undg.org/

2.3   Types of Indicators

The three widely acknowledged types of indicators (that ASK also follows) are input indicators, outcome indicators and impact indicators. Table below indicates for further details.

Indicators	Narrative
Input indicators:	Input indicators measure the contributions necessary to enable the program to be implemented (e.g., funding, staff, key partners, and infrastructure).
Outcome Indicators:	Outcome indicators measure whether the program is achieving the expected effects/changes in the short, intermediate, and long term.
Impact Indicators:	These indicators provide a sign of how well the organization has achieved the changes expected a result the project/program. They are about measuring change. In other words they are a measure of the extent to which the organization has achieved desired objectives and the longer term goal.

2.4   Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks

ASK understands that the M&E framework is part of the M&E plan, which describes how the whole M&E system for the program works, including things like who is responsible for it, what forms and tools will be used, how the data will flow through the organization, and who will make decisions using the data2.

ASK monitoring tracks mainly the use of inputs (activities) and outputs, but in some degree also tracks (intermediate) outcomes. In contrast, evaluation takes place at specific moments, and permits an assessment of a program's progress over a longer period of time. Evaluation tracks changes and focuses more on the outcome and impact level. This is illustrated by the following graphic, which shows the link of the chain of inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts with the planning cycle.

2.5   Place of Monitoring & Evaluation in the Framework

Output measurement shows the realization of activities. Outcome measurement shows in what degree direct objectives and anticipated results are realized. And impact assessment shows the degree in which the overall objective or goal of the program is realized. Without defining clear and measurable goals, objectives and activities at the design stage, M&E becomes an impossible endeavor. This requires the development of measurable indicators: Specific, Measurable, Achievable / Agreed upon, Relevant/Realistic, Time-bound (SMART) that permit objective verification at a reasonable cost3.

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[2] http://www.tools4dev.org/resources/me-framework-template/
[3] UNISDR Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, 2018

2.6   Types of Monitoring
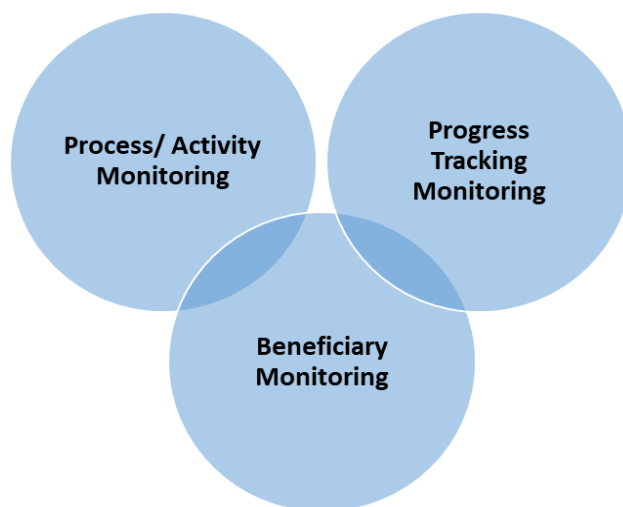
2.7   Process/Activity Monitoring

Program process monitoring is the systematic and continual documentation of the key aspects of program performance that assesses whether the program is performing as intended or according to some appropriate standard. Therefore, program process monitoring involves a systematic and continuous way of monitoring certain aspects of a program's process which would indicate how well the program is performing, if at all. These activities help to facilitate the effective management of the program because continuous assessment allows for regular feedback about the program's performance4. The process/activity monitoring help ASK to track the use of inputs and resource, progress of the activities and the delivery of outputs and examine how the activities are delivered.

2.8   Progress Tracking Monitoring

Progress monitoring is used to assess program performance, to quantify the extent to which objectives have been achieved at a given time5. This is is used to ensure that client program/projects are making progress and on track to deliver the required goals. Progress is entered against those targets and the trackers automatically calculate deviation against the targets. Progress Tracking Monitoring also helps ASK to assess whether time-critical activities are taking place as per the calendar or not.

2.9   Beneficiary Monitoring

Beneficiary monitoring is a specific type of impact monitoring that aims to track the perceptions of project or program beneficiaries6. This is a continuous monitoring activity during the implementation of the activities that aims to track the perceptions of ASK projects beneficiaries. It includes beneficiary feedback mechanisms and beneficiary complaints mechanisms. Beneficiary monitoring is used by ASK as a specific type of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

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[4] From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia , https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Program_process_monitoring

[5] American Institutes for Research, https://rti4success.org/essential-components-rti/progress-monitoring

[6] IFRC (2011) Project/ program Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Guide, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Geneva, 2011

2.10 Use of Outcome Harvesting

ASK evaluations involve use of OH to harvest outcomes resulting from program interventions. We understand that Outcome Harvesting collects ("harvests") evidence of what has changed ("outcomes") and, then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.

In the context of ASK evaluations harvesting 'outcome leads to capturing of a broad spectrum of perceived results involving various stakeholders other than relying only on the detailed SMART outcomes. In addition, the development of an 'Outcome Map' depicting umbrella outcomes and the Impact is helpful when engaging informants in order to review the existing data, identify missing information, and substantiate the evidence. It helps to visualize where and to what extent in the result chain have contributed to the overall results. We also use the following conceptual framework in our evaluation process, in addition to the use of OH,
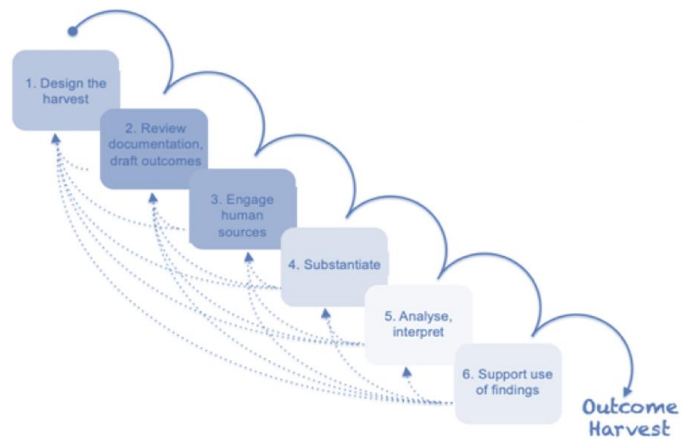
2.11 Conceptual Framework of the Evaluation Process
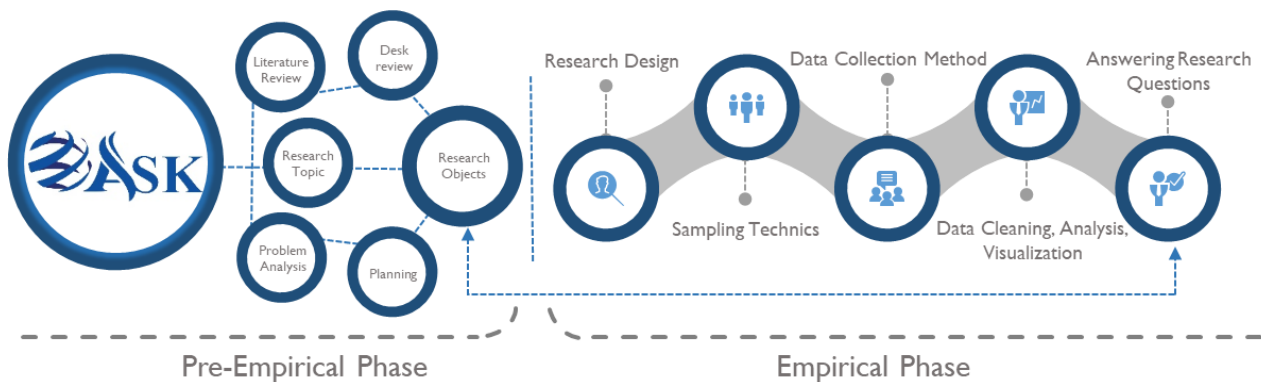
As indicated in the above conceptual framework, we start with literature review to clearly conceptualise the project purpose, indicators and activities. This enables us to develop the research/ evaluation design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, instruments and finally data analysis.

2.12 Key Evaluation Questions: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Sustainability and Participation and ownership

ASK follows the evaluation questions produced by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD7. These questions are assumed to increase the effectiveness of program activities by supporting robust, informed and independent evaluation. These questions are among the guiding tools for evaluation of projects implemented by ASK clients.

2.12.1 Key Evaluation Questions

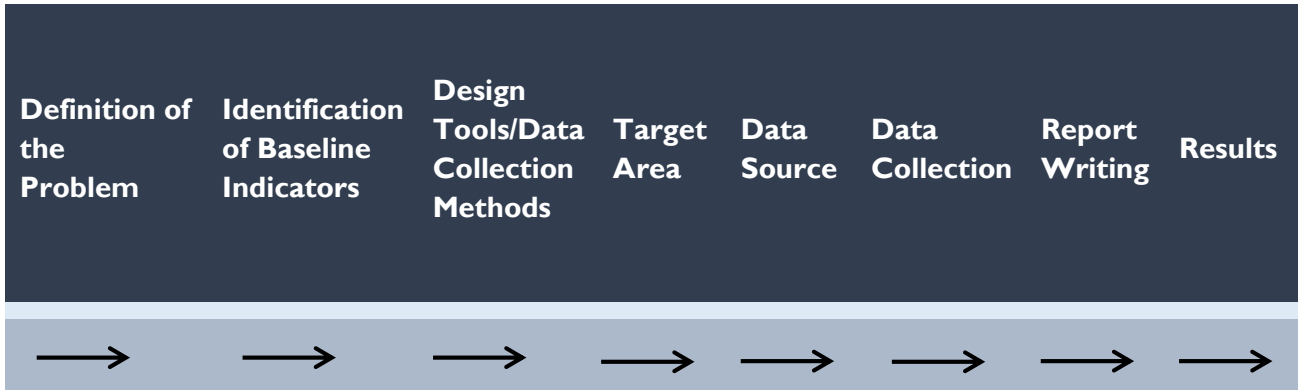| Key Evaluation Questions	
1. Relevance	**Data Sources**
• Were the needs and priorities of actual target group beneficiaries taken into account?	• Project documents • Interviews with project beneficiaries
• Are the different stakeholders (e.g women beneficiaries, project staff, government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) satisfied with their participation in the project? if not or yes, why?	
• Is the project consistent with policies of both donors and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan? Is the project consistent with the government peace plan?	=do=
2. Effectiveness	**Data Sources**
• To what extent has the project achieved the planned results, i.e. outputs and outcomes (including short term, intended and unintended)?	• Target beneficiraies • Project documents
• To what extent was the project's theory of change verified/ achieved? • Have the targeted beneficiaries registered the intended change?	• Project staff • Target beneficiraies
3. Efficiency	**Data Sources**
• Where the planned project activities implemented in a timely manner? • Where the project results including outputs and outcomes obtained within the expected time frame • Was the management system including oversight of project activities effective? • Was the project implementation effectively monitored; and did the M&E mechanism in place help in the implementation of the project? • How cost efficient is the project activities? • Were the materials and methodologies used in the most appropriate and effective manner? • What major factors influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?	• Project documents • Project staff

4. Impact:	Data Sources
• To what extent did the project achieve the desired impact (in terms of the overall goal and strategic objectives)? • To what extent did the different components of the projects lead to reduction in violence against women, foster participation of women in politics and decision making, support the role of women in the peace process, and improve gender relations in the security sector • What were the unintended effects of the project (positive or negative)?	• Project beneficiairies • Project documents • Project staffs
5. Sustainability:	Data Sources
• What activities and/or outcomes (both expected and unexpected) of the project are likely to be long-lasting and sustained, and what evidence is there to suggest this? • Have the target beneficiaries taken ownership over the project activities? • To what extent are the benefits of the project expected to continue once the donor funding has ceased?	• Project target beneficires
Recommendations	Data Sources
• What has been the most important impact and changes realised based on data collected and analysed through the barometer approach? • How can the sustainability of the project? • What activities have been put in place to ensure that ensure continuity of the registered benefits.	• Project beneficiairies • Project documents • Project staffs

NOTE: Details of the key evaluation questions are normally developed with the client during inception phrase.

3 Baseline Studies

The purpose of a baseline study is to provide an information base against which to monitor and assess an activity's progress and effectiveness during implementation and after the activity is completed. Sometimes the data needed for a baseline, against which to measure the degree and quality of change during an activity's implementation, will already exist and in such cases the only task is to collate the data and ensure that it can be updated in the longer term. So it is important to find out what information is already available and what is missing in order to fill the gap during baseline surveys. When planning a baseline study, the implementing organization needs to determine both what change needs to be assessed and what sort of comparison(s) will need to be made as part of that assessment of change.

3.1 Baseline data collection matrix

Definition of the Problem	Identification of Baseline Indicators	Design Tools/Data Collection Methods	Target Area	Data Source	Data Collection	Report Writing	Results
→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→

3.2   Purpose, advantages and Challenges of Different Data Collection Methods

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

Method	Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	When need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way	• Can be completed anonymously • Inexpensive to administer • Easy to compare and analyze • Easy to administer to many people • Can get lots of data • Many sample questionnaires may already exist	• Might not get careful feedback • Wording can bias client's responses • Are impersonal • In surveys, may need sampling expert • Doesn't get full story
Interviews	When want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	• Get full range and depth of information • Develops relationship with client • Can be flexible with client	• Can take much time • Can be hard to analyze and compare • Can be costly • Interviewer can bias client's responses
Documentation review	When want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	• Get comprehensive and historical information • Doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program • Information already exists -few biases about information	• Often takes much time • Info may be incomplete • Need to be quite clear about what looking for • Not flexible means to get data; • Data restricted to what already exists
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes	View operations of a program as they are actually occurring - can adapt to events as they occur	• Can be difficult to interpret • Can be complex to categorize • Can influence behaviors of program participants • Can be expensive

4 Data Quality Standards

Relevant project personnel are trained in basic M&E methodology and data quality standards, given tools to use in data collection, updated regularly on program progress, and mentored on an ongoing basis. Data quality training help staff and implementing partners to avoid common data quality pitfalls by focusing on key questions such as whether there is a direct relationship between the activity and what is being measured.

ASK ensures the quality of data collected and reported by using the data quality assurance tools. The data quality plan ensures that target setting and results reporting are informed by consistent and sensitive information (sensitive information in here mean data that the donors or partners might find interesting and it's not supposed to be shared with other parties). This would include various dimensions including reliability, accuracy, soundness of methodology used to collect and analyze the results, the extent to which the data is available and its timeliness.

Standards for data quality are key to ASK intended use of the data. That is; the level of accuracy, currency, precision, and reliability of information on results and should be consistent with the management requirements.

ASK will ensure that the five data quality standards are in place:

1. **Validity**: Validity refers to the extent to which a measure actually represents what we intend to measure.

2. **Reliability**: Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes and analysis methods over time.

3. **Precision**: Precise data have a sufficient level of detail to present a fair picture of performance and enable management decision-making.

4. **Integrity**: Integrity focuses on whether there is improper manipulation of data.

5. **Timeliness**: Data should be available and up to date enough to meet management needs.

In addition, ASK M&E desk will use the following two primary tools to control the quality of data and monitoring by field staff:

- **Internal Data Quality Assessments**: The Research and Communication department will conduct their own data quality assessments on a quarterly basis to ensure that all collected and recorded data are complete.

- **Random Quality Control Audits**: The Research and Communication department will develop a confidential schedule for quality control audits of program data, to be reported to the Executive Director and Program Manager on a quarterly basis. If travel to the field to conduct audits becomes difficult due to security issues, additional verification documentation will be required, including pictures, sign-in sheets, reports, etc.

4.1   Data Management

Within ASK, data management refers to the processes and systems which will systematically and reliably store, manage and access M&E data. It is a critical part of the M&E system, linking data collection with its analysis and use.

Data is consolidated within a custom-built excel database or SPSS with custom reporting functionality, Data extracted through the database is analyzed to inform quarterly, semi-annual, annual reporting and to draw conclusions as to which interventions should be continued, adjusted, or eliminated.

Data is analyzed to identify programmatic successes and lessons learned, as well as areas where gaps exist and where ASK should consider adjustments to implementation. To provide a proper context for data analysis, ASK compares program data to secondary sources and key context indicators to help frame what the data is indicating. Understanding the context of positive and negative impacts allow ASK, more broadly, to make informed choices about program priorities and activities within the country. The data base is maintained by the senior evaluation specialist.

4.2   Reporting and Its Cycle

ASK M&E desk on regular basis use the reporting cycle on monthly, quarterly and annual bases to reports progress with relevant stakeholders. In summary, chart below portrays the M&E reporting cycle within ASK:
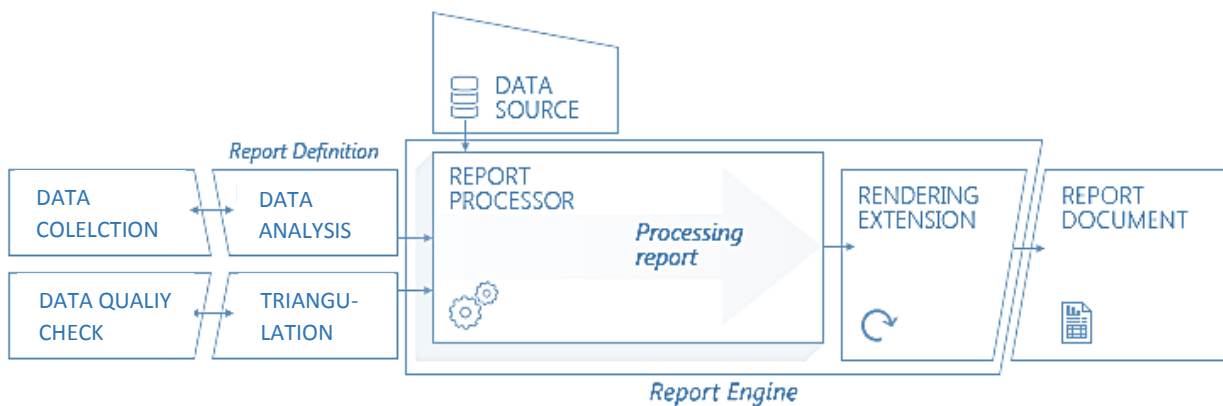
4.3   Qualities and Characteristics of ASK Evaluations

1. Values diverse opinions
2. Accurate and technically adequate information
3. Leads to continuous learning and improvement
4. Uses participatory methods
5. Affordable/Appropriate in terms of budget
6. Responsible persons carry it Out/timely carried out
7. Indicators properly selected and studied
8. Opens opportunity for better understanding developmental change
9. Never used for fixing blame and finding faults

1. It should be factual: Every report should be based on facts, verified information and valid proofs.
2. Clear and easily understandable
3. Free from errors and duplication
4. Should facilitate the decision makers in making the right decision
5. Result focused and result oriented
6. Well organized and structured
7. Ethical reporting style

5 Hypothetical M&E Plan Performance Measurement Framework

GOAL:
AUDIENCE:
PROBLEM STATEMENT:
OBJECTIVE 1:

Activity	Outcome/Output Indicator Description	Data Collection Method	Baseline		Midline		End-line		Total Target Achieved	% of Total Target Achieved
			Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual		
Activity 1:	Output									
	Output									
	Output									

5.1 Hypothetical M&E Activity Matrix

Goal 1:			
Strategic Objective	Key Activities	Immediate Results	Long Term Impacts