Module 6: Monitoring for adaptive management

A culture for adaptive monitoring

A monitoring framework can be understood as both a set of formal procedures for monitoring, and content on what is monitored. However, a third element, the culture of the organisation, is also very important for an adaptive programme. There are different aspects to such a culture, including the following:

Honest inquiry, critical reflection and respectful dissent

One of the key enablers for adaptive management is a programme team that is inquisitive. The team needs to reflect critically on its own work and discuss what went well and what did not. It is also important that staff feel that they can admit that things went wrong, and are not incentivised to ‘prove’ success. One element of this is making sure that the indicators used for performance management are not set as targets.

Given the complexity of a market system, there will not be one single answer, and different or competing perspectives will add value to a discussion. Team members therefore need to be encouraged to be open if they disagree with one another, and to offer their own view of a situation.

Creating an environment where such discussions can be carried out openly and professionally will improve the scope for learning and therefore for the programme to adapt as necessary. Senior team members have an important role to play in creating this atmosphere.

Monitoring as the responsibility of each staff member

Market systems programmes need to have a dedicated team that plans and
that data collection is in fact carried out. However, it is very important that senior programme staff and intervention managers are actively involved in analysing and drawing conclusions from monitoring data. If this is restricted to the monitoring team, it is much less likely that the programme will use the findings.

Making use of the tacit knowledge derived from practical experience in the field is also particularly valuable for market systems programmes. Field staff in particular should be required to actively reflect on their interactions with market actors and what they observe happening in the field. This understanding can also make a significant contribution to interpreting monitoring data, and in making review discussions productive. It is therefore important that this task is included in their job description.

Tools that can help with this include field diaries, after-action reviews, and regular team meetings where open reflection takes place.

For similar reasons, there is a good case for programmes to favour conducting research in-house where possible. While outsourcing a study to external researchers may result in higher quality studies, this often comes at the cost of ownership of research findings. Giving programme staff the chance to get out ‘into the field’ on a regular basis will also provide them with a much better understanding of the broader context than can be provided by a written report.

### Monitoring and results measurement in value chain development: 10 lessons from experience

Top tips from an urban value chain project.

### Making decisions based on data

Analysing and discussing data before making decisions needs to be the norm, with decision-making based on evidence rather than preconceived ideas, particularly where the data contradicts the programme’s theory of change or intervention-level results chains.

It is important that data is checked for plausibility and ideally that the findings are confirmed by triangulating findings from other sources of information. Continuously asking the question ‘how do you know?’ is helpful in such discussions, as it will focus attention on the accuracy of sources.
Programme managers and other senior decision makers have a key role to play in fostering a culture of learning and critical inquiry. Field-level staff who spend most of their time with market actors will normally have more exposure to ground level realities, which emphasises the need for programme managers to create the space for them to voice their opinions.

Senior managers also need to lead by example, to participate in review meetings and engage actively in discussions, asking challenging questions such as 'how do you know?' in order to link discussions with monitoring data. If senior managers delegate this work there is a risk that the rest of the programme team will perceive it as low priority task.

Another important role of management is to enforce discipline so that monitoring tasks are performed in a timely and quality manner. This role is especially important in the early stages of a programme. It may take a while before it becomes clear to the staff that monitoring data is useful for them. Until this happens, programme managers need to make sure that the tasks are still performed.

- **Navigating complexity**
  What's needed to support effective adaptive management.

- **Samarth: Making sense of messiness**
  How a DFID-funded programme in Nepal deals with market system messiness.

- **Admitting failure**
  Support for organisations on how to admit failure.

For practical examples, read the monitoring stories from [Rural Markets](https://beamexchange.org/guidance/monitoring-overview/module-6-monitoring-adaptive-management/culture-adaptive-monitoring/) and [RAIN](https://beamexchange.org).