

Institutionalising a sophisticated MRM-system



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This is one of a series of stories that complement the [BEAM Monitoring Guidance](#). It offers a practical example of how a market development programme has solved a typical monitoring or evaluation challenge.

Rural Markets is an SDC-funded project in Bolivia implemented by Swisscontact and PROFIN. Using a market systems development approach, the project aims to contribute to the reduction of poverty and improve the quality of life of thousands of rural families in the vegetables, dairy, fruits, tubers and other value chains. Rural Markets also aims to strengthen the overall business environment of Bolivia.

The challenge

The project faced several challenges when it tried to institutionalise the MRM-system under the [DCED Standard](#). The main challenge was figuring out how to induce organisational changes in the co-facilitators in order to go from non-formal to standardised monitoring practices, when the co-facilitators had no incentive other than the donor's requirements to comply. For example:

- Each co-facilitator had their own way of monitoring, which was based on a traditional approach.
- As in many organisational change processes, co-facilitators showed some resistance to the new monitoring standard because at first glance it appeared complex and labour-intensive.

- › Knowledge about the DCED's measurement standard among co-facilitators was zero, and it was also weak in Swisscontact Bolivia.
- › Conceptual documents about monitoring under the DCED standard were available, however the concrete guidance necessary to make it operational was quite diffuse.
- › The monitoring system was not appreciated enough at higher decision-making levels of the project; it was rather seen as a duty to comply with donor requirements.
- › Monitoring was seen as the sole responsibility of the monitoring advisors.
- › The project management preferred to adapt an existing open-source MRM system from one of the co-facilitators instead of setting up a simpler, possibly Excel-based, system.

The solution

To address these challenges, Rural Markets carried out the following actions:

- › The project management team started to provide constant support to the monitoring advisors.
- › Incentives (resources, training and recognition) were identified and given to the co-facilitators to stimulate their collaboration and thus easily generate information for the MRM system.
- › Organised participatory workshops with the co-facilitators to better understand the MSD approach and adaptation to the DCED standard
- › A monitoring training plan was carried out for the entire project team to strengthen knowledge and skills, thus accelerating the MRM adoption process.
- › Tools and methods were applied, and field visits carried out, with the co-facilitators instead of only the monitoring advisors.
- › The budget for monitoring was increased to around 5% of the total budget.

These activities have enabled the project team to apply the relevant MRM processes, tools and methods in order to generate information and knowledge in a practical and trustworthy way.

The decisive factors leading to this success were capacity development within Swisscontact and the co-facilitators, and the application of well-placed incentives. At one year prior to the end of the project, we can say that the project's monitoring system has achieved good results. However, some challenges remain. There are still elements to discuss regarding the reliability and generalisation of information at the level of effects and impacts on the beneficiaries. Besides that, the overall setup and flexibility of the open-source MRM system remains a challenge. A simple Excel-base MRM system might have been better.

Do you have anything to add, or want to ask a question? Please comment below or [contact the author](#).

To learn more, see the BEAM Monitoring Guidance on a culture for [adaptive management](#).

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