
THE OPERATIONAL GUIDE FOR THE MAKING MARKETS WORK FOR THE POOR (M4P) APPROACH

05

MEASUREMENT

ARE YOU ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS
TO SUPPORT GOOD DECISIONS?

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05

5.1 KEY PRINCIPLES AND STEPS

“The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong question” Peter Drucker

“The effective use of data – learning by measuring – is at the heart of how we should manage complexity” Owen Barder

Monitoring and results measurement (MRM) is key to successful market systems development programmes. Market systems are complex, and intervening to make them more efficient and inclusive is not a matter of implementing a fixed plan. MRM must be both rigorous and pragmatic in order to deal with this complexity.

MRM in market systems development programmes must take into account two specific considerations:

- Monitoring and measuring system-level change and its impact on the poor: measuring change, and its sustainability, at the system-level is a priority. Ascertaining whether system-level changes are benefiting the poor is also vital. Programmes must be able to measure causality from intervention to poverty reduction via system-level change, isolate the impact of their interventions from wider influences, and identify programme beneficiaries within a wider population
- Dealing with complexity and unpredictability: change processes are driven by market partners operating in dynamic environments; outcomes are not fully within programmes' control. Flexibility and responsiveness are crucial. Programmes need timely, accurate feedback to assess intervention effectiveness and adjust their actions accordingly. MRM must be integral to the intervention process and the role of all staff

The information generated by an effective MRM system supports two interrelated yet distinct goals. It provides evidence to 'prove' development outcomes (ie impact and their attribution to programme intervention). It also supports continuous learning and adjustment in order to 'improve' the effectiveness of programme intervention to bring about better outcomes.

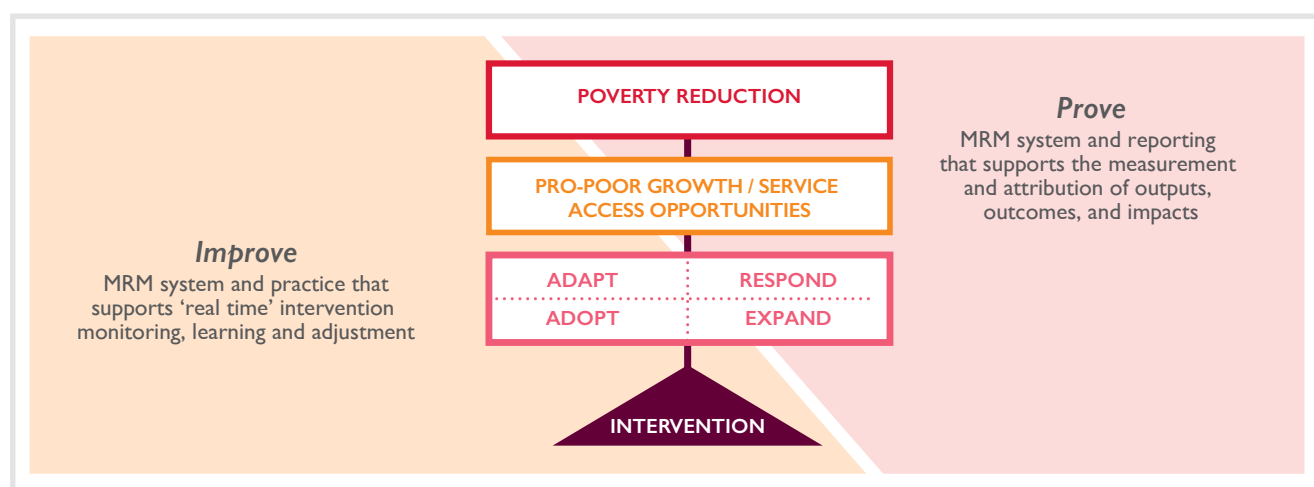


Figure 20: Measuring systemic change

Establishing a rigorous process for MRM capable of proving and improving outcomes entails five steps:

- Step 1: Assign sustainability indicators, augmenting the results chain where necessary:** Set results chain indicators that measure progress towards system-level, pro-poor growth or improved access and poverty reduction changes, as well as the sustainability of these changes
- Step 2: Project how much each indicator will change by:** Predict the extent of change anticipated for each indicator as a result of each intervention by a given date
- Step 3: Create a plan for collecting information to measure performance:** Detail who will undertake each measurement task, when, where and using which methods
- Step 4: Establish appropriate baseline information, then measure results:** Baseline information for each indicator is needed before intervention begins. Carry out measurement duties as per the measurement plan
- Step 5: Analyse and use MRM information to inform decision making and external communications:** Interpret the findings of MRM and use them to inform decisions about improving programme strategy and interventions. Learn from achievements and failures, and communicate both to funders and other stakeholders

5.2 ESSENTIALS FOR MONITORING AND RESULTS MEASUREMENT IN MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

A range of accepted good practices in MRM and technical resources are available to support practitioners (for example the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development Standard for Results Measurement). The Guide does not aim to replicate these, but rather complementing them by focussing on those aspects that are specific to market systems development. In particular the Guide emphasises the role of MRM in decision making and its integration into intervention and management processes.

A rigorous yet pragmatic MRM system is needed to address two key monitoring and measurement challenges for market systems development:

- *The need to monitor and measure system-level change and its impact on the poor:* you need to be able to measure across the chain of causality – your programme’s strategic framework – from intervention to poverty reduction via system-level change. You can’t rely on high-level poverty impact indicators to determine this. A range of intermediate indicators, quantitative and qualitative, are required to assess progress up your results chains, employing different methods on a case-by-case basis. To do this, the MRM system will need to draw upon information from the diagnostic process that defined the focus of intervention in the first place. The emphasis on monitoring and measuring system-level change, with the aim of highlighting the sustainability of changes instigated and informing intervention decision-making, necessitates programme MRM systems to be fully integrated with processes of intervention management.
- *The need to deal with complexity and unpredictability:* you need to recognise the interconnectedness and uncertainties of market systems, ie their complexity. To do so, an MRM system that captures, interprets and acts on information quickly is critical. Without this feedback, management will not be equipped to adjust interventions that are not progressing. Of equal importance to MRM system design is staff attitude. Management has to develop a culture that is learning-focused and that endorses self-critique. It is this that makes adjusting interventions possible. This has implications for how your MRM system is set up, staffed and resourced. The system and culture together is what allows programmes to respond to complex environments

Integrate MRM fully into programme management systems

MRM is not simply the component of your programme that captures logframe indicators for funders to ‘prove’ that the programme is being effective. It informs daily decision-making across your programme to ‘improve’ its performance. MRM drives effectiveness. This vital role must determine MRM systems’ design and management.

Key questions to ask of MRM systems are:

Are you developing, testing, and maintaining an integrated MRM system?

An effective MRM system takes time, resources and commitment to develop and to integrate with decision-making processes.

Your MRM system will have to capture and deal with a lot of information, including partner activity, field observations, focus group feedback, survey data, expert reports and case studies. Handling this much information can be a challenge and

requires suitable procedures, opportunities, and documentation to incorporate new knowledge and interrogation (ie what is working, why, how? What isn’t working, why not, how does it need to change?). Intervention guides (see Chapter 4) should be designed to capture all this information.

Managers should expect to pilot MRM systems and procedures and to refine them over time.

Are you drawing on information from the diagnostic process?

Make the most of the knowledge the programme already possesses. Information from the diagnostic process (see Chapter 2) provides the starting point for key measurement information needs, ie indicators and baselines. Programmes will already have a detailed understanding of how market players are underperforming and what they need to change as well as the target group’s performance and poverty status.

In simple terms, you should ‘diagnose down’ the strategic framework to define your interventions; then you can use much of the same information for indicators and baselines to ‘measure up’, from intervention to impact on poverty.

Programmes often neglect that they have this information at their disposal and instead commission separate, expensive baseline surveys. This wastes time and money. Utilise your diagnostic information, supplementing it with additional baseline assessments where needed.

Are programmes and funders able to get what they need?

The MRM system must produce information for programme funders as well as for its implementers. Funders and implementers have diverse uses for information, and thus different information needs.

The MRM system has the dual purpose of programme management and external reporting. It is, however, important that reporting requirements are not driving the design of your MRM system. Management and decision-making utility must be the number one priority.

In practice, an effective MRM system that supports internal programme learning and improvement should generate the kinds of information needed by external partners too. But, it remains important to:

- Discuss funder information requirements as soon as possible, focusing on ‘essentials’ rather than ‘nice to haves’
- Agree a realistic schedule for what can be reported and when. Programmes find it useful to communicate to their funders using their results chains. This gives rise to discussions that are more focused on the sequencing of market systems development interventions, as well as the time-lapses expected between activities being undertaken and impact being reported
- Regularly review whether requirements are being met, adjusting the MRM system where necessary to also capture information funders wish to see

Are you getting the balance right?

MRM systems need to be tested and refined. This means programmes need to find out: what they can measure feasibly, which indicators work, which tools and methods are suitable, what needs to be simplified, and which technical service providers can be relied upon.

Your MRM system needn’t be academically perfect, but it must balance the need for rigour with the need to be affordable and able to be operated by programme staff.

Taking MRM seriously requires dedicated resources. The MRM system doesn't need to cost a fortune but it needs people, time and management.

Reality check: Resourcing MRM activities

Although measurement and learning are shared responsibilities between MRM staff and intervention staff, MRM staff with specific technical measurement and analytical competencies should account for at least 10% of all programme staff.

Don't forget to budget for costly items, such as large surveys outsourced to technical service providers, as well as for the measurement of intervention achievements up to two years after intervention has ceased (to assess not only how sustainable changes stimulated have been, but also to give a better indication of impact).

Take MRM and learning seriously

Demonstrate MRM system utility

Although essential to programme success, intervention staff often won't take MRM seriously unless they receive signals from management to do so. Managers must prioritise not only the development and testing of the MRM system, but management's adherence to analysis- and learning-based decision-making.

Senior managers must be seen to use the MRM system and the knowledge it generates as a decision-making tool. As MRM generates useful insights and feeds into intervention re-design, the incentive is created for monitoring and measuring to continue.

Regularly review, triangulate and interpret information

MRM information can only be used for decision making if procedures are established for routine, structured reflection by the team (ie monthly information check and triangulation, quarterly progress reviews) and if senior decision makers participate.

Regular meetings to review and triangulate information on progress, and discuss changes to interventions, drive critical reflection. These should focus on what is not working and where you are getting stuck, rather than on briefing management. These sessions should be fixed in the programme calendar as routine events (eg monthly) so that they are prioritised and well-prepared.

Establish a culture that encourages internal criticism

Effective learning requires a spirit of open, critical enquiry across the programme: continually asking what does and doesn't work, and why. If staff are unable to critique themselves and one another, the full potential of the MRM system will not be realised.

Staff can feel that the 'failure' of interventions reflects negatively on them, eg jeopardising their promotion prospects. It is inevitable that some interventions won't work and staff should not regard this as failure. Managers must work hard to develop and maintain a culture of openness, honesty and receptiveness to constructive criticism.

Leading by example is important. A programme which is overly hierarchical or fixated on chasing targets will lead to a 'closed' culture inhibitive to honest reflection and learning. This is hard to reverse.

Iterative adjustment of intervention strategies, results chains, indicators, and measurement plans in response to regular feedback and reflection is normal in market systems development. Programmes are only as flexible as the staff within them!

Avoid segregating MRM staff from intervention staff

To be most effective, measurement staff will need to work very closely with intervention staff. Understanding of your programme's approach, market system analyses, and intervention strategies should not rest solely with intervention staff.

Avoid segregating measurement and intervention staff in the office and ensure that measurement staff accompany intervention staff on non-measurement tasks and *vice versa*. Intervention staff should have ownership over results chains, indicators, and measurement plans. They are not simply the tools of measurement counterparts. Intervention staff on their market systems development programmes will typically spend far more time working on measurement, analysis and learning-related tasks than staff on other programmes.

Reality check: MRM building blocks

Assess progress towards an operational MRM system by asking:

- Are market systems strategies developed? Are these supported by credible diagnosis?
- Do all main interventions have results chains?
- Have key indicators been developed and tested?
- Are measurement plans realistic and adequately resourced?
- Is the team leader or a senior manager driving the MRM process?
- Is there an MRM manual that is known by staff?
- Can all staff explain what their role is in MRM?
- Are all staff involved in review and triangulation sessions? Are there records of this?
- Is there agreement between funder and implementer on reporting requirements and scheduling?

5.3 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The following five step guidance focuses on priority considerations for MRM in a market systems development programme context. **Steps 1 to 4** should be repeated when you begin a new intervention. Some steps may also require repeating for the same intervention, as the intervention progresses.

In practice, **Step 5** is needed whenever any significant monitoring or measurement information becomes available for any given intervention, to interpret the findings and decide if results chains, indicators and projections need updating.

Step 1: Assign sustainability indicators, augmenting the results chain where necessary

Chapter 4 describes the use of results chains as a key element of programme intervention guides (see 4.2).

Though the results chain is the management and measurement 'backbone' of intervention, it is only given meaning if the indicators of change are well formulated, ie SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) and if they are tested and amended accordingly. In some instances, you may need to use proxy indicators to tell you something about a change that is hard to measure.

Reality check: Assigning indicators

Assigning at least one indicator to each box in the results chain helps you to track progress accurately and to examine your assumptions about how change was predicted to take place.

For some programmes, this can create a large number of indicators to track. This level of detail can be useful so long as it informs decisions or is used for reporting. To avoid irrelevant indicators, ask yourself:

- Will changes in this indicator inform my next steps?
- Will this indicator help establish the link between change at one level in the results chain and the next level up, ie the chain of causality?
- Is this indicator needed for reporting purposes?

It is a common mistake to select indicators at the start of the programme, and then stick with them, regardless. What seems like a sensible indicator during planning might not be practical when it comes to actual measurement, in terms of feasibility, reliability, significance or replicability on a larger scale.

The results chain and its indicators are only meaningful in a market systems development programme if the sustainability of output, outcome, and impact changes are also measured. Assigning sustainability indicators will ensure that your programme takes sustainability seriously.

Assessing sustainability requires you to determine whether the innovation players have adopted is continuing independently of the programme and whether crowding-in has taken place.

The systemic change framework (see Chapter 4) provides a way of reflecting on both the sustainability and scale of impact and assists programmes in planning their next move.

Sustainability indicators can be created for each element of the framework (adopt, adapt, expand and respond) and can be used to augment pilot and crowding-in phase results chains.

Sustainability indicators help programmes:

- Track changes in partner behaviour, capacity and motivation, drawing attention to those partners who are struggling to continue with new roles
- Track changes in the level of partner ownership, and signs of the shift from 'adopt' to 'adapt' (ie independent actions)
- Assess whether scale and sustainability depend on too few players
- Identify whether other players in the systems are responding positively to changes introduced, or where the wider environment remains unsupportive of pro-poor change

Figure 21 presents **key questions** that you will need to answer before concluding that your results are sustainable. You will need to generate credible evidence that the answer to each of these questions is 'yes'. It also provides examples of indicators that can help you to answer these questions.

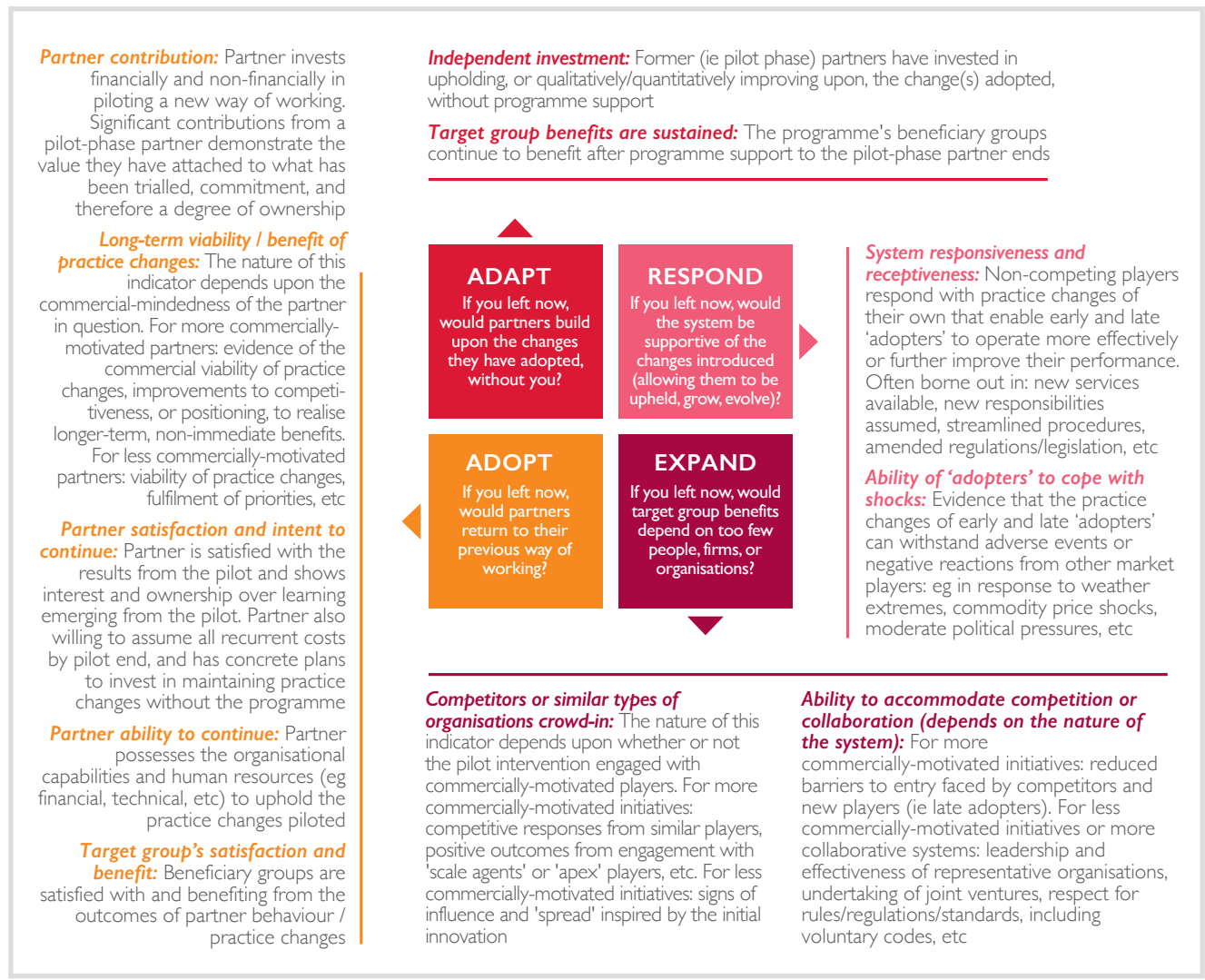


Figure 21: Key questions and indicators of sustainability and scale

The indicators in Figure 21 are illustrative: you will need to tailor them to the context of the system you are working in.

Note that when you measure scale (how many, how much) you focus mainly on the changes stimulated by your interventions. When measuring sustainability, the same is true, but you must also be alert to what has not happened and what is not yet in place.

Step 2: Project how much each indicator will change by

Projections are not targets. They are 'best estimates' of results, by a given date in the future, based on current information. Use the information you gathered during the diagnostic process to help you make realistic projections.

Programmes tend to draw on estimates of the size of the current market (eg traded or consumed volume/value) or the size of the service access frontier. These estimates establish a projection 'ceiling', within which intervention strategy-based projections are made as to the proportion of the market or access frontier that their work will conservatively impact.

Estimates may not be exact, but they are important. They help you make decisions. Projections allow you to compare the expected benefits of interventions with their estimated costs and decide whether an intervention is value for money, ie likely to result in sufficient and sustained developmental impact to justify its cost.

Projections are, therefore, most useful when they are reviewed and updated regularly. They are also more useful when time-bound: you should project how much change will occur and by when it is forecast to occur.

Take care that staff do not begin to chase projections, misinterpreting them for targets. Targets and year-on-year milestones are a topic for programme-level discussion in the context of the overall programme logframe. Managers should not delegate targets directly to intervention staff as this incentivises more intensive and direct intervention and may undermine sustainability.

Use your intervention results chains to remind staff of their immediate focus on system-level change, the causal logic of intervention, and the importance of not taking shortcuts.

Projections should include a period beyond the intervention itself (eg two years after intervention ends) in line with the need to demonstrate results that last.

Reality check: Project and communicate clearly

Funders can be impatient to see results during the early stages of a programme's life, because it takes time to achieve impact. This can be addressed by making and sharing realistic projections to give your funder a concrete sense of what the programme is likely to achieve.

Communicate clearly that these are projections only, and explain key assumptions. Your projections should be conservative. Some programmes use an 'optimism bias factor' to reduce their projections, eg only using 70% of any estimated impact figure.

Step 3: Create a plan for collecting information to measure performance

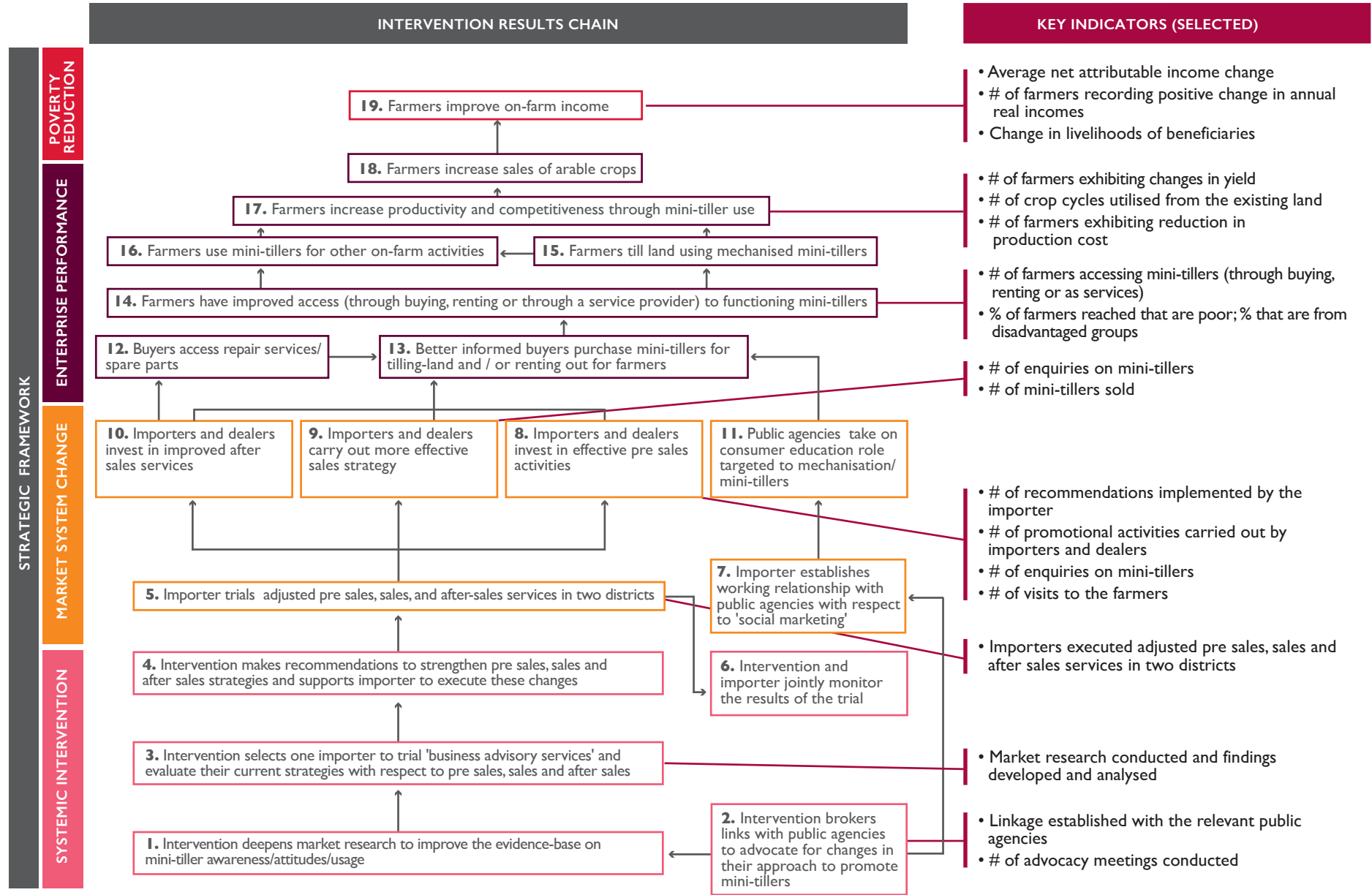
The next step is to compose a measurement plan for who will undertake each measurement task, when, where, and using which methods. Define clearly the roles and responsibilities of all staff.

Develop your measurement plan as follows:

- *List and number each result:* list each anticipated result from the results chain against its respective 'level' (ie system change, growth/access, poverty reduction). Each 'result' should be assigned a number
- *Questions:* list the key questions that you want to answer by measuring changes that relate to each box
- *Indicators:* set indicators, including sustainability indicators, for each results chain box (see **Step 1**)
- *Assumptions:* before piloting an innovation you invariably make assumptions about its future costs, its level of usage and level of response to its presence. These assumptions need to be validated in time. Include them in your measurement plan, next to the most relevant results chain box
- *How, who, and when:* list the methods and sources of information you will use to measure changes in the relevant indicators. For each indicator, add who will measure it and when
- *Baseline:* write what baseline information there is, for each indicator. Remember to revisit the information gathered during the diagnostic process
- *Projections:* write what results you project, for each indicator, as per **Step 2**. Supporting calculations are best written elsewhere (eg on a separate spreadsheet)
- *Progress:* for each indicator, write the cumulative attributable results already recorded (ie the results so far)

Example 35 (overleaf) provides an illustrative results chain based on a real example from a programme in South Asia, accompanied by a set of indicators for selected results.

Example 35: Intervention results chain and selected indicators



Choosing the right methods

The methods you need to use to measure will vary. When creating the measurement plan, reflect on the purpose for measurement, the level of the results chain you are measuring, the phase of intervention you are in, and the resources at your disposal. There are many technical resources available to help practitioners select between methods depending on the purpose for measurement (and therefore the level of rigour required) and the resources and budget available.

Reality check: Don't expect a single method to do it for you

The Degrees of Evidence framework for monitoring and evaluation funded by USAID offers a practical framework that seeks to address the confusion surrounding measurement methodologies. The framework helps programmes to assess their methodological options according to their purpose, rigour, and cost in order to match MRM methodologies to the questions asked, the level of credibility sought, and the level of resources available.

Where practical, it is good practice to use at least one qualitative and one quantitative method to measure each indicator, and different methods and sources to triangulate data received. Quasi-experimental and qualitative methods are recommended for use in market systems development programmes:

- *Quasi-experimental methods help you assess what has changed:* assessments (eg surveys) comparing those targeted by the intervention (experimental group) with those similar to your target group who remain unaffected by your intervention (comparison group). Differences between affected and unaffected groups are especially useful to gauge how much change occurred due to programme interventions
- *Qualitative methods help you assess why something has changed:* in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations by programme staff and enumerators will help you to understand the reasons behind the changes emerging from quantitative data. This is necessary for estimating attribution, but also for assessing the sustainability of outcomes and results

Whether or not a suitable comparison group is available must also be factored in. Quasi-experimental methods are easier to use within relatively homogenous populations. Even in these circumstances, finding the right comparison group(s) requires careful planning.

Your findings can be inaccurate if factors other than the intervention itself cause one group to do better than the other, during the period of study. They will also be invalid if your interventions start to influence the comparison group as well as those targeted. Where no comparable group exists, the following two options should be considered:

- Look for 'matches' (people or entities) in other regions that are similar to the specific people or entities in the region of the affected group
- Analyse and compare trends between affected and unaffected areas, then try to identify and discount all factors other than the intervention that cause results to vary between affected and unaffected areas. External influences may include macroeconomic trends, new infrastructure, regulations, climatic events or the effects of other development programmes

Remember to cross-check findings from quantitative and qualitative studies. This will help identify mistakes as well as capture nuances and explanations missed by using quantitative methods alone.

Reality check: Look for the unexpected

When analysing data look for clusters (ie lots of feedback showing similar results), including any which may be surprising. Are there any obvious anomalies? Are unexpected factors at work?

Investigate any 'surprises' to see if errors have occurred with some basic follow-up and verification tasks post-assessment. Intervention staff may also wish to include some open-ended questions in survey instruments for enumerators/researchers to use when speaking to partners or your target group, so that you're less likely to miss out on information that could challenge your expectations. Equally, encouraging enumerators to talk to respondents informally after the survey can reveal new and unexpected insights, which they should be incentivised to make a note of.

Step 4: Establish appropriate baseline information, then measure results

You need baseline information to assess whether change has happened, and the extent of that change. Measuring the difference between the groups you target and relevant comparison groups, before and after your intervention, lowers the risk that your results are biased by differences between these groups that are unrelated to your intervention.

As noted earlier, the diagnostic process provides the starting point for establishing indicators and baselines. Important information will emerge from the diagnostic process as well as pilot activities that can never be captured upfront by a single, large scale baseline survey. Where additional baseline data are needed to complement that generated during diagnostics programmes commonly undertake a number of smaller, targeted studies to complete their baseline information.

Be smart about baselines

In considering establishing baselines, ask yourself the following three **key questions**:

Have you made the most of the information gathered during the diagnostic process?

Your understanding of the target group, how they engage in market systems, and the growth or service access opportunities that present themselves as well as the functions, players and their performance within the system provides essential baseline information against which to measure change.

Establishing baseline information starts with your diagnosis of the market system and how the poor engage with it. It draws on understanding of your target group and the nature of their poverty; the current level of income or service benefits; and how efficiently and inclusively the system is performing. Building the baseline from your diagnoses saves effort and keeps strategy and measurement coherent: you should diagnose down and measure up.

Are you putting too much faith in a single programme-wide baseline study?

It is better to conduct several smaller baseline surveys specific to each system or intervention given how specific data needs are and how locations and target groups are likely to vary across interventions. In conducting a single baseline study to cover all interventions, you often find that the people assessed initially are not those who are ultimately covered by your interventions.

When are you planning your baseline?

When conducting small complementary baseline surveys is appropriate, timing is critical. The expected trajectory of impact on beneficiaries is longer for market systems interventions because systems must first change before lasting impacts can be measured. Consequently, the imperative to complete your baseline as soon as the programme mobilises is lessened. More importantly, surveys conducted too early may pre-empt emergence of the focus of intervention (eg. principal or supporting market system; operational geography) during the diagnostic and piloting processes.

Significant delays in capturing baseline information may make your results less accurate. The people you wish to assess may no longer recall their exact status before the intervention began.

If you are unable to establish a reliable baseline from the outset, you can still measure results accurately later. Sample sizes can be made larger and even more care should be taken to identify and isolate any factors that might differentiate targeted and comparison groups.

Use good measurement practices

You should adhere to accepted good measurement practices. The following **key questions** are particularly relevant to programmes employing the market systems development approach:

Which measurement tasks is it safe to outsource?

Outsourcing some tasks, such as the conducting of large surveys, is pragmatic: it frees up staff time and can bring technical expertise and independence to your measurement. Outsourcing is also useful when cultural or political sensitivities require you to disguise your involvement, or in situations when a third party is regarded as more impartial or acceptable.

However, if you do hire external parties, make sure to remain fully involved. You must still set the overall framework for the measurement task, supervise and quality assure data collection and cleaning, and troubleshoot where needed.

Other measurement duties are better conducted in-house by staff who are able to construct clear, logical results chains, select research methods, develop and refine survey instruments, analyse and interpret findings of incoming data, and aggregate results.

How reliable are secondary sources?

Secondary data analysis is vital in understanding wider market system change. However, information relating to market system change is rarely specific enough to record reliable baselines or to credibly assess changes if taken solely from secondary sources. It is particularly important to do your own research at this level in the results chain.

What exactly do you need to measure?

Some programmes collect large volumes of information, yet need only a fraction of it. The information that you gather only has to be 'good enough for now'. Double-check surveys, filtering out less relevant questions. Clear results chains keep you focused on information that is essential rather than 'nice to have'.

Step 5: Analyse and use MRM information to inform decision-making and external communications

Reviewing and adjusting interventions and strategy

Information generated by monitoring and measuring should be used to review intervention progress: are results being realised as envisaged? These internal reviews and the process of data triangulation are the essence of integrating MRM systems into programme decision-making. Intervention results chains and indicators should be updated to reflect any alterations.

Use monitoring data to assess your progress against the indicators in your Systemic Change Framework. Discuss whether partnerships should continue, be adjusted or exited altogether, based on the levels of partner contribution, motivation and ownership.

Establish processes and procedures that encourage staff, including managers, to use information to review the programme's performance regularly. A combination of formal and informal processes and procedures are needed:

- **Formal processes and procedures:** regular progress review and data triangulation meetings should be scheduled, ideally monthly and quarterly. These are interactive meetings involving all technical staff. They require key documents to be up-to-date and shared with peers beforehand as inputs.

On a quarterly basis you should review progress against the up-to-date version of the intervention results chain: is the intervention working? Have key activities resulted in changes to how players within the market system work? What else needs to change? Do assumptions still hold?

On a monthly basis you should review the status of specific partnerships: is the partnership working? Is this partner the right 'vehicle' for achieving system-level change?

It is useful to use some simple 'early warning' checks when reviewing partnerships: what is the likelihood that your partner will continue to fully adopt the changes they are experimenting with? Are incentives of all parties clear? Are the changes initiated by your partner having an effect on your target group and is it the desired effect?

- **Informal processes and procedures:** staff in market systems development programmes tend to have considerable autonomy. Important tacit knowledge can be lost because staff lack the means to capture and share the information they amass when in the field, on the phone with partners, or in discussions with informed third parties. Help staff to maintain simple records or 'learning narratives' to capture this tacit knowledge. This isn't a reporting obligation, merely the documenting of staff knowledge as and when it expands.

These records constitute an important part of the programme's memory. They provide the raw material for formal meetings. They help capture vital qualitative information, give you insights into what else is going on in the system beyond your interventions, and identify issues that need to be followed up.

Communicating progress to programme stakeholders

Think carefully about what you need to communicate to whom. There is a tendency in development to share all information with everybody. In reality, this blunt approach is unhelpful and can even be damaging. At its best, it leads to information overload and the undermining of the market intelligence you have generated. At its worst, it can put inappropriate information into the hands of people who are not in a position to interpret it correctly, and lead to misperceptions and erroneous expectations.

These problems can be avoided by developing a simple, audience-specific, communications strategy. Based around your strategic framework, this should map out who needs to know what, when and in what form.

When communicating to funders, emphasise how the programme achieves impact, explaining the connection between system-level changes and the large, long-lasting poor outcomes expected. Communicating this connection, with evidence drawn from sustainability indicators, should lessen demands for 'quick impact' that often arise out of the funders' nervousness that results are taking time to materialise (see also **Step 2**).

Case studies, thematic reports, and other similar 'products' also give you the opportunity to present findings, particularly the narrative underpinning change and important lessons learned, that might be 'lost' through more routine reporting.

5.4 "DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES I DID..."

Stay in charge of the MRM system

MRM is central to programme implementation and management. Programmes often become dependent on external resources to set up and lead their MRM systems. This tends to be expensive and ineffective.

Your MRM system will need constant leadership and adjustment. This can't happen through periodic consultant inputs or recommendations in a report. It needs to be led by management with dedicated staff and programme-wide commitment. Outsource tasks carefully.

This said, MRM is also a technically demanding area. Recognise that you can't do everything alone: make use of available expertise and experience. Make sure you are clear about what you want, stay in control of the process and try to build your staff capacity as you go.

Be realistic about external research capacity

If you need to outsource large-scale surveys, you need to ensure that the results are reliable. Some research organisations try to serve their clients by telling them what they want to hear, not by delivering independent, rigorous research.

Make sure you check the track record of prospective firms carefully and take the time to orient any enumerators and managers hired-in from such firms. Shape and stay involved in the research task and trial survey instruments first before doing the full survey. This will not only provide a test for the methodology of your survey, but also the firm's ability to undertake tasks as required.

Recruit the right people

In-house staff are vital. It is important not to simply recruit people on the basis of a CV with extensive MRM experience. That doesn't necessarily mean that it has been 'good' MRM experience. Instead you need to look for critical attributes:

- Ability to develop and update results chains and indicators
- Ability to manage and analyse large-scale surveys and triangulate between different sources and information-gathering methods
- Strong analytical skills to organise and interpret incoming data
- Ability to identify key informants and design and conduct small 'rough and ready' surveys
- Ability to write clearly, eg mini-cases and briefing notes

Involve partners in measurement on their terms

Avoid asking partners to collect information for measurement if the information you are asking them for is not relevant to them. Conversely, programmes should encourage partners to monitor information important to their own (future) performance, either in-house or by hiring researchers, if they do not do this already.

Take care to leave the right impression

When you monitor and measure, for both ethical and practical reasons, assessors should avoid creating unrealistic expectations (eg giving the impression that your programme will be giving people hand-outs).

Where the risk of creating such expectations is high, you might try contracting 'mystery shopper' researchers, or rely on interviewing a few key informants within your target group, who are less likely to misunderstand the monitoring task.