

# CHAPTER 1

## Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

An organisation which is carrying out any activity needs to have some system in place to ensure that its work is going according to plan, and to identify and solve problems as they occur. The most basic example is that of financial monitoring. This is required to check that the organisation has sufficient funds at any time to purchase inputs, pay suppliers and staff, and to check that all money is accounted for and none is misused. Such a financial monitoring system is required by every organisation, whether a business or development agency.

In addition, an organisation will want to take stock of its position from time to time. In the case of a business, it may want to see how far it has grown, if it is meeting its customers' needs and what lessons have been learnt from experience. Again, the most common form of review is that given in the annual accounts. Investors, staff and customers will look at such accounts as they make decisions about their future involvement in the company.

Development organisations should have such financial systems in place as a matter of course, but they are concerned about much more than just their finances. People engage in development activities in order to bring about positive changes to address particular problems. These may be problems they face themselves, in the case of community organisations, or problems faced by others in the case of external development agencies. A strong monitoring and evaluation system will help to ensure that the work is going in the right direction.



Source: Feuerstein 1986:19

In this chapter the basic groundwork for monitoring and evaluation systems is laid out. We look at the purpose and definitions of monitoring and evaluation and outline some of the different approaches to them. The relationship between project planning and monitoring and evaluation is explored and some of the basic concepts used are introduced.

## Why Monitor and Evaluate?

It is important for all concerned in social development projects that their work is continuously monitored and regularly evaluated for the following reasons:

### Accountability

This is often seen as the most important reason for monitoring and evaluating development programmes. In every case, those who are implementing the programmes are carrying out work on behalf of others and it is important to be confident that they are working responsibly, i.e. they are accountable.

Accountability works in two directions:

**Accountability to donors** – many social development programmes are supported by funds from donors who want to know how the money is used. Increasingly they also want to know whether the work they support is having the desired effect. Many Northern NGO donors are under increasing pressure from their own donors, especially where these are governments, to increase and improve their level of accountability. Monitoring and evaluation can justify the allocation of scarce resources to the project.

**Accountability to project users** – those involved in social development are acting on behalf of others, either as representatives of the community which is expected to benefit from the project, or as an external organisation which is aiming to support the development process. In either case, the people running the project have a responsibility to show the people they serve what they have been doing and to explain their actions. Donors are likely to give resources to an organisation to work on the community's behalf; the community is entitled to know what resources have been given and how those resources have been used.

Examples:

An NGO building a school classroom is accountable for the quality of the building to ensure that it is of appropriate standards and is safe.

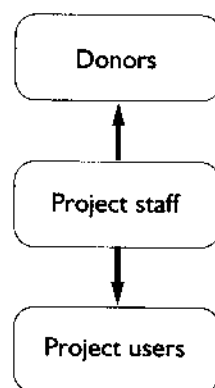


Figure 1: Lines of accountability

An NGO providing training for the unemployed to help them obtain jobs should provide training which is appropriate and gives relevant skills.

There is often less pressure to improve the accountability of NGOs to project users than to donors. This means that an NGO may be less accountable or responsive to these users than the government and the commercial sector – poor service leads to elections being lost by governments or reduced sales and profits for businesses.<sup>1</sup> There may be no similar penalty for an NGO which is doing a bad job. Many NGOs offer services as a monopoly – project users either take the poor quality service they are offered or leave it and do without any service. There is little competition (at the level of the beneficiary as opposed to the income sources) and few ways of dissatisfaction being signalled back to NGO managers. Monitoring and evaluation can help to create this feedback loop, hence the growing interest in participatory methods which capture client views and perceptions.

### Improving Performance

This is an equally important reason for setting up a monitoring and evaluation system, although some see it as secondary to ensuring accountability. Ongoing monitoring will show how resources are being used and highlight problems as they occur so that they can be addressed. Issues raised by monitoring may include concerns about day to day management such as inefficient use of staff, or signs that the project is (or is not) producing the outputs that it planned and that they are achieving the desired results.

Examples:

Monitoring how many people took part in meetings showed that more women came when meetings were held on Sunday afternoons rather than weekday evenings. Moving more meetings to Sundays helped the organisation improve the participation of women in the project.

Routine monitoring of people's attitudes to community health workshops run by an NGO showed that many were not putting the lessons into practice in their homes. This prompted the NGO to review the content and delivery of its health education material.

Periodic evaluations can improve performance by taking an overall view of a project's achievements and direction (drawing in monitoring data) and making recommendations for changes in the light of experience.

### Learning

As well as improving performance in an individual project, monitoring and evaluation can also provide valuable lessons for other projects within the same organisation or those run

<sup>1</sup> See Fowler (1997).

by other organisations in the same sector or location. These lessons may be applied to existing projects or to those which start in the future to help them repeat successes or avoid failures.

Not only do the results of monitoring and evaluation contribute to learning, but also the process of carrying out monitoring and evaluation can help staff and project participants develop new skills:

- Stakeholders' involvement in monitoring and evaluation can increase their motivation to participate in planning and implementing future activities.
- By assessing achievements and problems, participants in monitoring and evaluation enhance their analytical capacity and critical awareness.

### **Communication**

Monitoring and evaluation can help increase the communication between different stakeholders by exposing them to each other's perspectives on an intervention. This may be closely related to learning but it may also extend to those who have no direct influence on the implementation of the project. Thus clients may learn something about the donor agency, the Northern public may learn more about the reality of the people they are supporting, either through donations to an NGO or their taxes. To succeed in this, the monitoring and evaluation should be carried out in such a way that the different stakeholders do not feel threatened, so they can openly discuss successes and problems faced by the project.

## **Definitions of Monitoring and Evaluation**

So far we have mostly talked about monitoring and evaluation as if they are virtually the same. Before proceeding further, it is important to make clear the difference between the two terms. In this book we take the definitions of monitoring and evaluation to be as follows:

***Monitoring* is the systematic and continuous assessment of the progress of a piece of work over time, which checks that things are 'going to plan' and enables adjustments to be made in a methodical way.<sup>2</sup>**

It has often been said that monitoring is concerned with looking at the project's activities and outputs rather than its overall objectives and the changes brought about by the project.<sup>3</sup> In this book we reject this view and argue that it is just as important continuously to

<sup>2</sup> Drawn from Gosling and Edwards (1995: 81); Blankenberg 1995: 413.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Cracknell (2000: 165).

monitor what the project is achieving as it is to monitor what it is doing.

Monitoring is an integral part of the management system and will generally be carried out by those involved in the project from day to day. At the least this will involve the project staff, but it is even better if the project users also participate in monitoring.

The process of monitoring will include a wide range of meetings, workshops and other activities, which should contribute to accountability, improved performance, learning and communication. The tangible outputs, which should capture much of this process, will include regular reports such as monthly field reports, quarterly reports to the organisation's senior management and annual reports to other stakeholders such as project users, relevant government departments and donors.

**Evaluation** is the periodic assessment of the relevance, performance, efficiency and impact of a piece of work with respect to its stated objectives.<sup>4</sup> An evaluation is usually carried out at some significant stage in the project's development, e.g. at the end of a planning period, as the project moves to a new phase, or in response to a particular critical issue.

An evaluation will measure what progress the project has made, not only in completing its activities but also in achieving its objectives and overall goal. It will assess what changes have occurred as a result of the project taking place – both those changes which were planned and also those which were unexpected.

An evaluation will usually involve people who are not directly engaged in the day to day running of the project as well as a wide range of stakeholders. Often the evaluation may be led by a person who is external to the organisation such as specialist consultant, but at times it may be appropriate for an organisation to arrange an internal evaluation using its own staff. Whoever is leading the evaluation, it should be participatory and involve all stakeholders – especially project users and staff – at all stages from design to conclusion.

Like monitoring, the process of evaluation is likely to be an end in itself and will result in improved accountability, performance, learning and communication. The output of an evaluation may include a one off report prepared by the evaluation team, which will describe the evaluation's findings and present recommendations for immediate and future changes within the project and the organisations involved. In the process of preparing this report, the evaluation team should hold a number of workshops or other meetings with stakeholders to present draft findings in order to ensure that the final report takes into account their views.

These differences between monitoring and evaluation are summarised in Table 1. In this book we differentiate between monitoring and evaluation only according to how they are carried out and at what point in the project cycle. However, we assume that both practices are concerned with answering questions about outputs, objectives and impacts. Experience has shown that it is very difficult to assess progress in achieving objectives in

<sup>4</sup> Drawn from Casley and Kumar (1987), Gosling and Edwards (1995: 89).

**Table 1: Summary of differences between monitoring and evaluation**

	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>Timing</b>	Continuous throughout the project	Periodic review at significant point in project progress – end of project, mid point of project, change of phase
<b>Scope</b>	Day to day activities, outputs, indicators of progress and change	Assess overall delivery of outputs and progress towards objectives and goal
<b>Main participants</b>	Project staff, project users	External evaluators/ facilitators, project users, project staff, donors
<b>Process</b>	Regular meetings, interviews – monthly, quarterly reviews etc.	Extraordinary meetings, additional data collection exercises etc.
<b>Written outputs</b>	Regular reports and updates to project users, management and donors	Written report with recommendations for changes to project – presented in workshops to different stakeholders

periodic evaluations if information has not been collected throughout the project's operation. It is even harder to understand the project's impact unless changes have been regularly monitored.<sup>5</sup>

## Different Approaches to Monitoring and Evaluation

As part of the groundwork for designing a monitoring and evaluation system it is essential to understand something of the theoretical basis on which the project rests. Behind every social development project is a conceptual framework – a way of viewing the world and making sense of it which brings with it a particular understanding of the way people behave and social changes occur. This conceptual framework will make a difference to the way that social problems are analysed and the resultant projects designed to address them (see Box 1).

Over time, as new conceptual frameworks have evolved, there have been many changes in the approaches towards social development. These have been reflected in way that monitoring and evaluation is carried out. There is still considerable debate about good practice in monitoring and evaluation and there is no one 'best practice'. There is a range of views of how the development process should be monitored and evaluated and the two extremes can be described as technocratic and pluralist:

<sup>5</sup> Note that similar distinctions between monitoring and evaluation can be drawn where the object is a programme, sector or strategy, rather than a project. For example, if we are looking at the implementation of a strategy, the scope of monitoring may be concerned with incremental changes within the organisation (new management systems etc.), while an evaluation may look at how these organisational changes work out to affect the lives of those involved in the development work of the organisation.

**Box 1: Making the conceptual framework clear**

'Underlying social development is always an implicit or explicit understanding that development is about social change or transformation. It is argued here that it is not possible to evaluate social development without being clear of the conceptual basis upon which the social development programme is built. An essential part of the pre-planning for the evaluation will be to identify as far as possible the conceptual, theoretical and even ideological foundations or origins from which the programme has emerged'. (Marsden et al. 1994: 119).

For example, one person may take the view of the world being an arena of competing interests where it must be assumed that, as a general rule, different groups do things in ways to maximise their own interests. Therefore, the world can be seen as inevitably in conflict and the role of social development is to help the weak overcome the oppression of the strong.

Another person may understand the world as one where people's position is determined by chance and what is holding them back is their lack of access to education and new technology.

Two people with these different views may interpret the same facts about food shortage differently. The former may come up with a project focused on improving people's rights and access to resources (land, water, agricultural inputs). The latter may design a project more concerned with technical advice to improve farmer's skills in dealing with water conservation, soil erosion, storage.

Different organisations will operate with different conceptual frameworks and there may be various conceptual frameworks in different projects within the same organisation. If the basic model of social change underlying the project can be made clear, it will help all the stakeholders understand better what the project is trying to achieve and why. This will make monitoring and evaluation easier.

- **Technocratic** – based on the view that, with the right resources, science and technology will provide the solutions to all human problems and their progress can be monitored and evaluated using mechanisms that are objective and value neutral. For example, in this approach evaluations *should* be carried out by an external evaluator who will judge the project's progress in a scientific way against set criteria. This view tends to assume that the techniques for achieving successful development are known and shortfalls in the projects are likely to lie in poor management. The results of monitoring and evaluation are likely to be fine tuning rather than any major revision of the project's assumptions, perceptions or design. The technocratic approach will often involve an increase in managerial control and a drive towards standardisation through the preparation of manuals and operating procedures so that successful projects can be replicated.
- **Pluralist** – this approach is based on a pluralistic view of development which holds that different perceptions of reality should be treated with respect and considered in their own right rather than having one scientific correct answer. It believes that different stakeholders will have different perspectives on the world in general and

development projects in particular. Thus success or failure will mean different things to different observers. A successful agricultural project as defined by an agronomist, which increases yields through the use of a hybrid, may be a disaster to local women who find the hybrid is less useful for brewing, which provides an important supplement to their income.

This means that there are no absolute or objective criteria for monitoring and evaluation which can be set by planners or evaluators in advance from outside. It also means that due to the perceptions of evaluators having their own social and cultural origins evaluations are never neutral. An evaluator therefore should aim to provide an interpretation of events rather than a judgement. The evaluation process is therefore designed to provide space for dialogue between stakeholders rather than produce a report which gives merely the views of the evaluators.

Clearly these two approaches are set out as extreme ends of a spectrum and there is plenty of middle ground between them. As views have moved along this spectrum, there has been a noticeable shift over time in the style of monitoring and evaluation used within public life, which has been described as passing through four generations<sup>6</sup>:

- **Measurement** – first generation: dominated by quantitative measurement and emphasis on facts with a stress on individual people or objects. E.g. for water supply, how many wells, how much water; for literacy, how many words can someone read.
- **Description** – second generation: more descriptive and looking at the progress of the whole project against its objectives. E.g. for water supply, assess the number and quality of wells covering an area; for literacy, review general progress in the classes, type of curriculum.
- **Judgement** – third generation: assesses the effects of development interventions and looks to establish whether an approach succeeded or failed and reasons for it. Tends to look beyond individual projects to programmes. E.g. for water supply, assess overall changes in district water supply to see if development interventions are causing improvement; for literacy, assess changes in levels of literacy in areas.
- **Interpretive** – fourth generation: involves range of stakeholders in assessing their different views of the project's progress and impact and negotiating a consensus for its future development. E.g. for water supply, listen to view of women who may no longer have to walk long distances for water, children who may have to wait for a long time by the new tap, to health workers who record changes in water borne diseases etc.; for literacy, listen to views of progress from teachers, learners, employers etc. and look at how the new skill is used.

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<sup>6</sup> See Guba and Lincoln (1989).



The first three generations rely more heavily on the views of project management and evaluators at the expense of other stakeholders, who tend to be disempowered. The approach taken in this book is primarily 'interpretive' to the extent that we stress the need to obtain a wide range of opinions and perceptions about a programme and not to depend purely on data collected by experts such as staff or other internal recording/monitoring systems.

## Basic Principles for a Monitoring and Evaluation System

In order to develop a monitoring and evaluation system for social development activities that is consistent with an interpretive approach, the experiences of many NGOs and other development organisations suggest that the following basic principles should apply:

- **Participatory** – the system should be based upon the participation of as wide a range of stakeholders as is realistically possible and the contributions of the various groups should be valued (see Box 2);
- **Minimum but cost effective** – it should not be over-complicated and should be understandable to both staff and project partners at all levels and should not require time consuming or unnecessary reporting;
- **Producing consistent, good quality information** – on output, outcome and impact to feed into the project cycle – both for accountability and learning purposes – leading to the ongoing adaptation of plans and objectives;
- **Gender aware** – women's as well as men's concerns and experiences must be an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation system. Data must be disaggregated by gender and the different impact of projects on women and men must be considered. The gender implications of changes to the project arising from monitoring and evaluation must be assessed to ensure that both women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.
- **Building capacity** – the system should be designed in such a way that it uses and develops the capacity of those involved for reflection on the project's progress and analysis of the monitoring and evaluation data;
- **Emphasising analysis and decision making** – the system should not merely be focused on the collection of data but ensure that information is analysed and used in decision making;
- **Including unintended consequences** – the system should not assume that the outcomes and impact resulting from the project are limited to those anticipated in the project but it should be able to record and analyse changes which were not expected;

- **Open to alternative sources of information** – the system should acknowledge the value of different types of information, both oral and visual, and of the perceptions of local people who have not been directly involved in the project.

Recent research and experience in social development practice<sup>7</sup> has shown that it is necessary to adopt a *process* approach to monitoring and evaluation in order to follow these principles. A process approach does not rigidly define all the key elements in the monitoring and evaluation system at the start of a project or programme; instead the system evolves out of the ongoing experience of implementing the project. In this approach stakeholders, and particularly the primary ones, have a key role since they are not used simply as the objects of exercises seeking to verify quantitative change, but more importantly they themselves suggest and describe the changes which may have taken place. Furthermore, a process approach will also continually examine the assumptions on which the project was based and change tack accordingly, and not merely crunch out the numbers. In a process approach the use of informal (often oral) information is important, since it is quicker and can often influence day to day decisions.

For a monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate qualitative change and the impact of interventions, it is essential that it is built around the participation of stakeholders at all levels. People's perceptions and experiences must lie at the heart of such a system. Local people must routinely be involved in identifying changes which are occurring and in understanding their impact and significance. Understanding sustainable changes in people's lives must take account of their values and priorities; projects cannot be deemed to have positively affected the lives of local people if the perceptions of the local people diverge seriously from those of external observers. In certain circumstances this may mean the deliberate playing down of the kinds of data and information which formal evaluations usually value and putting more emphasis on people's ideas on the changes which have occurred. Monitoring may be a formal process, but local people also continually monitor events and change in their particular way.

## Relationship Between Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Before any development initiative is started there will be a planning process which should ideally include all stakeholders. A major part of the planning will be to understand what development problem the project is hoping to address and how the project is expected to bring improvements. Any programme or project plan should include some statement of the problems, an analysis, which shows potential solutions, and a description of what the project will be doing to contribute to a solution. It is also very important that the proposal should describe what evidence will be used to demonstrate that the project is actually doing what it set out to do, and that this is achieving the desired results.

<sup>7</sup> See Oakley et al. (1998), Mikkelsen (1995: 166ff).

**Box 2: Participation and inclusion**

**Participation** must be a basic building block of the approach to monitoring and evaluation rather than just rhetoric. It will not be achieved instantly but will increase and deepen as local people gain confidence and become more involved in monitoring and evaluation. Various studies describe the process as having a number of different stages\*. One the simplest is the four stage model adopted by the World Bank:

<b>The Process of Participation</b>	
<b>Passive participation</b> ↓	Where stakeholders simply respond to requests for information and have no other role in monitoring and evaluation.
<b>Increasing involvement</b> ↓	Where stakeholders volunteer information and express interest in how it is used.
<b>Active participation</b> ↓	Where stakeholders are involved in deciding what information should be collected, methods used and the analysis of the data.
<b>Ownership/empowerment</b>	Where stakeholders play a key role in selecting the criteria and indicators for measuring project progress and call staff to account for the project's performance.

It is very important that participation is an inclusive process and is not restricted to dominant stakeholders who have the loudest voices. It is essential that the monitoring and evaluation system describes the impact on all key stakeholders' parties to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of benefits and the project does not contribute to inequality which is often at the heart of people's poverty.

The project's potential impact on gender relations should have been considered in the project planning, and it is essential that this is followed through to the monitoring and evaluation. In particular, women must be full participants in the monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that their views are taken on board and the impact of the project on women and men is disaggregated. Women and men are likely to have different areas of knowledge and information systems – for example, women tend to have more knowledge of the specific gender differentiated socio-economic indicators that define vulnerable households.

It is also important to ensure that people from different ethnic groups, socio-economic classes and ages are fully included in the design and operation of the monitoring and evaluation system.

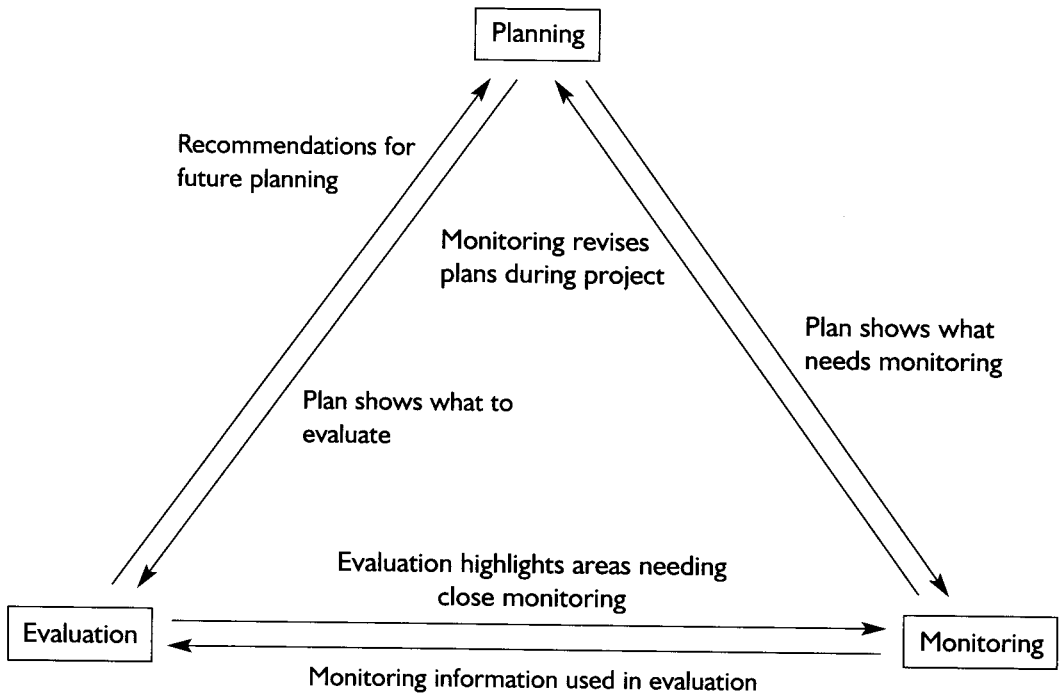
\* Biggs 1994, Save the Children 1994, UNDP 2000 *Empowering People A Guide to Participation*, UNDP guidebook

*In other words, the way that a project or programme will be monitored and evaluated must be considered at the design and planning stage.* In preparing a project framework it is normal to consider what indicators should be used and these often form the first criteria against which the project's progress will be measured. It is also important to consider the following factors:

- If changes are to be observed it will be important to record the situation before the project starts.
- If the project's progress towards its outputs, objectives and goal is to be monitored and evaluated, these must be clearly defined.
- For monitoring to be incorporated within the management of the project, it must be present from the beginning.
- In order to develop a participatory monitoring and evaluation system which includes the beneficiaries, they must be involved in deciding what changes should be monitored.

When monitoring you will check up on the progress of a project while it is continuing and you will want to identify what is going well and what is going badly. If things are going

**Figure 2: Links between planning, monitoring and evaluation**



badly you will want to change them. Therefore, monitoring must influence the ongoing planning of the project. You will also see how far the project is keeping to the original objectives you set out to achieve and you may find that these objectives are moving as the project progresses. Therefore, monitoring will also influence how you evaluate the project's achievements.

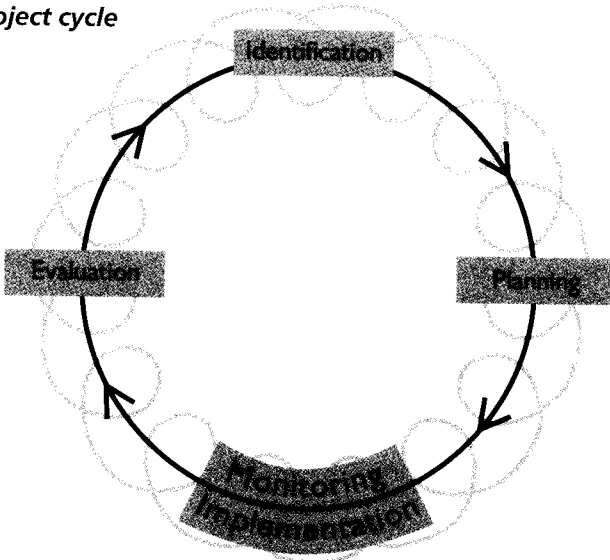
When you come to evaluate the project, you will need to know what you originally set out to do and what has happened throughout the project. The former should be clear from the project plan. The latter should be available from the work you have done in monitoring. Evaluation is made much easier (many would say it is only possible) if the required information is collected during monitoring. Evaluating your activity may be very interesting and show that you have achieved very positive results, or it may show where things have gone wrong. In either case, it is useless if it does not influence the future planning for any development of the project or similar projects elsewhere.

These relationships are summarised in Figure 2. The three elements of planning, monitoring and evaluation are intimately linked and cannot be dealt with in isolation. When put together as a triangle they can serve as the basis for a strong project, but if one element is missing the resulting project is likely to be weak, like a triangle which is missing one corner. The whole project will become even stronger as there is a process of feedback between planning, monitoring and evaluation – this can be represented by the smaller triangles in Figure 2.

## Project Cycle

Before moving on to discuss monitoring and evaluation in greater detail, it is important to present some of the common ideas and terminology used in project management. The

Figure 3: *The project cycle*



origins of each social development project or programme lie in the identification of a problem which it is thought an organisation can address through its intervention. The following steps of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are often simplistically represented by the project cycle (see Figure 3) in which evaluation leads to identification of further projects. The grey spiral gives a more realistic representation as there will be a continuous interaction between all elements of the project cycle – in practice things do not move smoothly from identification, to planning, to implementation etc., as a plain circle suggests. The project cycle and issues of project identification and planning are covered in greater detail in other books (e.g. Gosling and Edwards 1995, Mikkelsen 1995) and may well be familiar to many readers, who may be tempted to move quickly over this section. However, since different organisations use different terms, it is important to cover some of this ground in this guide.

The project plan should make clear the link between the problem and how the planned activities are expected to contribute to a solution. These links are often described by breaking down the project into different levels: goals, objectives, outputs and activities.

At the top level is the overall goal to which the project hopes to make a significant contribution by achieving its objectives, the next level down. These objectives represent results which the project hopes to bring about. The objectives are further broken down into outputs which are smaller results which the project can be confident of producing. These outputs are produced by a set of activities which are undertaken by the project stakeholders.

Example – drawn from a mother and child community health project

<b>Goal</b>	reduce under 5 mortality by 20% in 3 years [the project will contribute to this aim, but many other factors, such as food production, will also influence infant mortality]
<b>Objective</b>	within 3 years, 90% of families in district will have access to a mother and child health worker each month [this is directly related to the project but may depend on some factors beyond its control, such as newly trained health workers taking up jobs]
<b>Output</b>	6 new mother and child health workers trained by the end of year 1 [responsibility for this output should lie directly within the management of the project]
<b>Activities</b>	run 2 one-week training courses for MCH workers

Some organisations use different terms for these different levels:

Level	Alternative terms
<b>Goal</b>	Aim, General objective, Super-goal
<b>Objective</b>	Purpose, Outcome, Specific objective
<b>Output</b>	Results