MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines and Tools for the Preparation and Use of Indicator Performance Tracking Tables

Using Indicator Performance Tracking Tables

September 2008

Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* provides practical instructions in preparing and using the Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT). The IPTT provides a snapshot of project status, providing management, partners, and donors with information they can use to make necessary changes to implementation strategies.

This edition refers to the Food for Peace (FFP) Title II format, as there are many different types of tables used to track the combination of monitoring and impact indicators required by donors and implementing organizations. Additional material is available on how to construct indicators and develop an M&E system (see the appendixes in the complete module for detailed bibliographies). FFP also has required indicator definitions and methods for different sets of activities.

Who Works on the IPTT?

There are three key focal points for the different steps in an IPTT, and three additional resources that should be involved (see table 1). Field staff are critical. The IPTT should not be a static donor requirement that is updated just before a due date; rather, it should be used to help inform project management throughout the life of the project. Once project implementation starts, changes to the IPTT are inevitable. In terms of information provision, the greater the continuity the project can provide, and the more changes that are documented and the accompanying files maintained by field staff, the better the project staff can answer questions about project status.

Table 1

Field Staff	Additional Resources
Project technical staff	PVO headquarters staff
Project technical staff	FANTA Project staff
Project manager	Consultants

7 Steps to Preparing and Using an IPTT

Step 1 Clarify donor and PVO guidance

Step 2 Develop draft IPTT for the proposal

Step 3 Revise IPTT after baseline survey

Step 4 Update IPTT for annual reporting

Step 5 Revise IPTT during the mid-term evaluation

Step 6 Update the final IPTT following the endline survey and the final evaluation

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All field staff involved in programming need to understand how to:

1. Use the IPTT to quickly determine project status
2. Explain the data components in each indicator
3. Collect and analyze the information
4. Convey the information to different audiences (beneficiaries, other partners, and so on)
5. Revise the IPTT as donor requirements change

Additional staff resources can help with all these tasks, which are often overwhelming. Additional staff can also assist field staff in responding to technical questions about data collection or on interpreting findings, but it must be noted that these individuals are generally far removed from the specific project history and context.

Table 2

INDICATOR	Base Line	YEAR 1			YEAR 2 Mid Term Evaluation			YEAR 3			YEAR 4 Final Evaluation			YEAR 5		
		Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio
Impacts (Data only available for Baseline, Mid-Term and Final Evaluation Years)																
Maize yields (kg/ha)	850				1275	900	71%				1.700	1,400	88%			
Outcomes (Data only available for Baseline, Mid-Term and Final Evaluation Years)																
% farmers scoring at least 3 on Improved Practices Score Index	12%				60%	15%	25%				80%	82%	102%			
% of farmers' plots where improved maize practices were adopted	7%				60%	65%	108%				75%	60%	80%			
Repayment rate among agricultural credit borrowers	75%				85%	91%	107%				95%	97%	102%			
Outputs (Data available yearly)																
Number of farmers trained in Maize Improved Practices	0	400	485	121%	500	620	124%	600	630	105%	600	591	98%	600	650	108%
Number of model farmers completing course	0	25	25	100%	20	25	125%	20	20	100%	20	20	100%	20	20	100%
Number of farmers completing credit applications	0	400	185	46%	500	210	42%	600	430	72%	600	520	67%	600	550	92%

Sources: USAID Office of Food for Peace/FANTA, M&E Workshop, August 2007; Personal Communication with Alison Tamilowicz Torres, FANTA project, August 2008.

Note: Exp = expected; Act = actual.

IPTT Notes

1. Calculating the ratio data: if you expect a decrease in the indicator (e.g., percentage of children with low weight-for height), the column is expected/actual (E/A); if you expect an increase (e.g., percentage of mothers exclusively breastfeeding), the column is A/E. Note that this does not take into account the baseline and therefore does not give information on the amount of progress that is made toward an indicator target. However, USAID's current expectation is to report only E/A or A/E, depending on the direction of the expected change.

2. The project needs to report on annual monitoring indicators each year, while impact and outcome indicators are only to be reported on in certain years as determined by the Cooperating Sponsor (CS), under the CS's M&E plans. If the CS adjusts indicators or targets (for example, if targets are set too high or low), a clear explanation should be provided. Explicit FFP approval is required for decreases in the scale of targets. The CS should provide explanations in its annual results report submission and clearly identify proposed indicators and target adjustments in the report narrative and cover page.

3. Clearly specify the fiscal year being reported, (e.g., FY09), as well as the CS name, country, and page numbers on each page of the IPTT.

4. Programs implementing activities to improve health, nutrition, and hygiene behaviors should define the behaviors being measured, such as improved personal, food, water, and environmental hygiene.

Final comment: The IPTT template included in recent versions of the Multi-Year Assistance Program Proposal Application Format (annex A) is different from the one shown above. Both are acceptable.

Step 1 Clarify Donor and PVO Guidance

Donor guidance can change. Technical assistance can also change. Make sure to use the most current guidance from both donors and advisors when starting the design process.

Keep copies of any previous guidance used with the project documentation (e.g., for CRS, in the project's M&E Operating Manual).

Follow the Guidelines

Most major proposals contain detailed IPTT guidance. FFP is no exception; it has many requirements for each component in the proposal, as well as for a particular type of M&E system. The types of indicators and the required reporting format are detailed in annual guidance documents and in the general expectations of how the information collected will be used.

Make sure the most recent guidance is used so that the IPTT is as current as possible.

The FANTA project (see www.fantaproject.org) has produced a useful series of indicator guides that can help PVOs determine the definition and timing of indicators, and other aspects of data collection.

Most PVOs have internal standards and guidance for M&E systems that include indicators. These indicators are often more rigorous than the donor-required indicators or they may reflect a specific commitment from the PVO. In Table 2, the project reported on maize yields. The project may have also emphasized production in other crops, and collected those data as well, but did not report them in this format.

Determining the Number of Indicators

The number of indicators varies with each project, and the balance between impact and monitoring indicators varies as well. When selecting the number of indicators, be clear about what is both necessary and sufficient. The IPTT can include both the FFP and PVO indicators. If the project is partnering with other donors, there may be other indicators as well.

Step 2 Develop a Draft IPTT for the Proposal

The IPTT in the proposal is a key visual aid for the project design. There are many ways to design a project (see the bibliography in the IPTT module) that often involve months of discussions with beneficiaries, project field and headquarters staff, and other stakeholders.

Developing the IPTT

The IPTT needs to evolve with the description of the project activities. With a Strategic Objective, for example, develop a list of the indicators that most effectively captures the project's anticipated results. Are there any donor or PVO requirements for indicators in this sector? Add those to the list. Are there variations between required indicators among different stakeholders (e.g., exclusive breastfeeding for four months rather than for six months)? Sort those out as part of step 2. Get a consensus on the indicators right from the start of a project.

How frequently do the indicators need to be collected? Some indicators come with instructions, others vary depending on the types of activities the project will implement. Organize and schedule the data collection for the indicators (baseline and final only, or annually). Group the indicators under each Strategic Objective and Intermediate Result. There should be impact and monitoring indicators for most of the higher level results, although there may only be monitoring indicators for lower level results. Strive for balance—and determine which indicators are the most useful for project management purposes.

Once the required indicators and frequency of their collection are listed in the IPTT, try to estimate targets for each proposed indicator. National norms can be a good starting point until the baseline is done; more robust data from field-based needs assessments are even better. If this is a follow-on project, it may be best to start with the final values for indicators from the previous project.

Step 3 Revise the IPTT after Completing the Baseline Survey

The Baseline

First, ensure that the baseline survey will include all the indicators to be measured. There are many different resources that can be used to set up a baseline survey, from sampling to survey design and data analysis. There may be some activities that are not scheduled to start for several years in the project life, but even those indicators need to be measured during the initial survey to attempt to measure change over time.

What to look for following an IPTT baseline

- Starting values for project **impact** indicators
- Targets for **impact** indicators, based on best practices
- Starting values for project **monitoring** indicators
- Targets for **monitoring** indicators, based on best practices
- Notes about data collection **definitions or challenges**

Incorporate Baseline Research Results

After using estimates from different sources in the initial proposal, the baseline survey will provide a consistent baseline data source. Enter the new data into the IPTT, and, with your partners, determine the best targets for each entry in the IPTT. If data are collected annually, of course, annual targets are needed. If survey data is to be collected only at the baseline and final, then the next survey date will be when the project ends.

Setting Targets

Figuring out how to target appropriately is an important challenge. The good news, however, is that there are a number of places to go for advice, such as:

- Donor recommendations for required indicators
- PVO standard practices
- Staff with previous country experience or reports from similar projects

Once targets are set for the new baseline values, the IPTT is complete. Make sure to incorporate these values in the project's M&E plan and the subsequent M&E system. Project reporting must include updates on the selected indicators. With this information, reporting on the indicators will be more meaningful for IPTT users.

Step 4 Update the IPTT for Annual Reporting

IPTT Updating

Although IPTT updating is presented as step 4, it is really an annual requirement. In some cases, the IPTT can be updated by combining the values from quarterly reports. In other cases, a separate data collection exercise may be needed for annual indicators. It is often useful to have an updated IPTT (with explanations) available at annual stakeholder meetings. In many cases, however, the IPTT is updated at the last minute just before an annual report is due. This approach misses an opportunity to learn more about the project's annual performance.

Targets and Results

What happens when IPTT results don't match the targets? Even with all the best intentions in the world, sometimes projects start more slowly than expected, or there is an outside event, such as a cyclone or flood, or the project manager becomes ill, or a donor policy changes. These all happen. What should be done?

Targets are a big advantage to an M&E plan because of their flexibility; they can be changed easily. While changing indicators, particularly at the impact and outcome levels, usually means changing the project, often requires donor permission, and can raise a red flag for management. Changing targets, however, involves a small course correction, and these can and should be adjusted. If the project is consistently over-achieving its targets, the target levels should be increased. If, however, the project is consistently under-achieving its targets, they may need to be decreased or further refined. Investigate what caused the missed target, document it, and make sure that this revision is discussed with the stakeholders. Write up the new targets and document the rationale when submitting the annual report.

Step 5 Revise the IPTT following the Mid-Term Evaluation

The Mid-Term Update

If the project has steadily revised and updated the IPTT on an annual basis, then the mid-term update should be simple. However, many organizations do not update the IPTT consistently.

The mid-term evaluation is a great opportunity to have an outside project review; the project staff can see what's going on, what should be changed, and what should remain as is. The answers to these questions will have data implications. The starting point, though, is the IPTT update; this ensures that the evaluation team is working with the most current data available.

Organizing Questions for Project Staff

- Who is responsible for IPTT updates?
- What are the specific data definitions for each indicator?
- Who are the different sectoral leads for the respective IPTT indicators who can discuss the indicators with the evaluators?
- Where are the data maintained that are fed into the IPTT?
- How has the project been following up on changes in performance in the IPTT?

Organizing Options for the Mid-Term Evaluation Team

- Use the IPTT project structure to frame the evaluation report.
- Determine the validity of the current targets and likelihood of achieving those targets, based on the project's performance to date.
- Discuss the findings with the project team and other stakeholders.
- Recommend changes to targets based on evidence and determine any resulting changes to other parts of the M&E system or project objectives.
- If negotiated with the project team, include the annotated IPTT with the evaluation report.

Using Evaluation Results

Many agencies promote a user-focus to evaluations. Commissioning an evaluation and then ignoring the report is a waste of both time and money. So what should be done with an evaluation report with lots of recommendations?

There are four tasks to keep in mind with respect to the IPTT at this point in the project cycle:

1. Mid-term evaluation recommendations require a response. Adopt all of them or some of them or don't use them—whatever is decided, document the decision process.

2. Discuss the proposed revisions with key stakeholders to ensure that they are understood and that the changes reflect a shared perception of what is needed. Don't make changes without this important discussion.

3. Update the IPTT based on any changes made based on the report's recommendations.

4. And don't forget to update the M&E plan at the same time (it's not good to have two different versions concurrently).

All these changes can be documented as part of the annual report following the mid-term evaluation. Make sure the changes are real and not just on paper.

Step 6 Update and Finalize the IPTT after Final Survey and Evaluation

It's a very good thing when...

1. The final survey team can find documentation about the baseline—the survey instrument, the sampling frame, and the baseline data. A final survey should measure change over time in the impact indicators. In most cases, the data from the final survey provide the last input into the IPTT for the impact indicators.

2. The most current data are in the IPTT that is distributed to the evaluation team. While the final survey may take into account the impact indicators, there are frequently additional data collection times for the monitoring indicators—even after a final survey. This should be updated prior to the evaluation team's arrival in-country.
3. There is documentation available on any changes in the IPTT (e.g., indicators deleted, changed targets, data definitions, and so on). It is very helpful when project staff can explain the rationale behind the changes.
4. The project staff discusses any planned IPTT changes with the stakeholders so that they are kept informed (and can provide information on the effects those changes may have on their constituents).

Try to avoid situations where...

1. The final survey methodology baseline doesn't match the baseline. It's hard, if not impossible, to compare apples with oranges. Results cannot be compared over time unless the same indicator is being measured.
2. No one on the project team ever looked at the IPTT until just before the evaluation team arrives. Then no one can explain what the data mean.
3. The project makes changes based on the mid-term recommendations, but never changes what data they collect, so the indicators do not reflect what the project actually did.
4. The project makes changes to the IPTT, but never discusses the changes with the stakeholders, who continue to collect information based on the older indicators.

IPTT Rules of Thumb

1. Borrow from others. Why reinvent the wheel?
2. Compare your project with similar ones. Use standard indicators where possible, especially if it is necessary to aggregate data across projects.
3. Take advantage of expert help, especially from the FANTA Project. Other PVOs are a good resource, as well, especially if they have worked (or are working) in your project area.
4. Don't ignore FFP (or other donor's) guidance on indicators or format. Do assume that many of these indicators can be negotiated if you make a good enough case.
5. Be careful of overachieving targets and underachieving targets. The idea is to be on target or at least reasonably close.
6. Changing indicators or targets without permission is not a good policy. Changing targets based on demonstrated need is a smart move.
7. Management and project staff need to understand and use the IPTT.
8. If data collection methods change, make sure these are documented.

The full IPTT module includes examples of the following:

- Step-by-step instructions on completing the table
- Case histories of use in Title II projects
- Tools for managing and using the IPTT effectively
- Detailed resource bibliography
- Sample FFP guidelines

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

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The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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