



HOW TO DESIGN & IMPLEMENT MONITORING & EVALUATION IN A FRAGILE AND CONFLICT AFFECTED STATE

Lessons from Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS)

Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) is an initiative of the **Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI)** of the **Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS)**, funded by **UK aid from the UK government**, and GRSS. GESS will transform the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan – especially girls – through education.

In order to realise its strategic objectives of eliminating barriers to girls' education and promoting gender equality throughout the education system, MoGEI is supported by a consortium, led by **BMB Mott MacDonald/Cambridge Education**, and including **BBC Media Action, Charlie Goldsmith Associates** and **Winrock International**. GESS works at the local level through six State-based NGOs, referred to as State Anchors.

GESS was designed in 2012 just after the country gained independence. In 2013, shortly after the programme was initiated, conflict broke out in the capital and swiftly spread to other parts of the country. This continued fighting caused major changes to the working environment and consequent challenges to the programme's design and implementation.

Drawing on the experiences of GESS, this document provides an introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in a Fragile and Conflict Affected State (FCAS), including important considerations and recommendations for managing M&E in a protracted crisis context like South Sudan.

Adaptations to the M&E framework

A development programme such as GESS is usually implemented based on a Theory of Change and Logical Framework with set indicators at impact, outcome and output level. These tools were developed in the design phase of GESS, before the outbreak of conflict, and underpinned by a set of assumptions that held true at the time (2012). Reflecting on the continued relevance and validity of these tools and assumptions is important when the context changes significantly.

These tools are often linked to contractual obligations between the implementing agency and the donor. Government counterparts may also have specific stakes in certain components. It is therefore important to ensure close communication with the donor and the relevant government counterparts when considering making adaptations to these tools. This could be done by including it on the agenda of Programme Steering Committee meetings.

The rationale for any adaptations should be based on evidence, consider value for money and be well-documented. This demonstrates responsible decision-making and establishes trust between the implementing agency, government stakeholders and the donor in the results that the programme can be expected to deliver in the changed context.

The experience of GESS shows that it can be preferable to change milestones, rather than indicators, if outputs are deemed relevant and realistic in a crisis context.

Due to spikes in conflict, the timing of delivery of activities may change. Reducing the milestone for one year, but not the overall target or the indicator is a flexible approach to reaching the overall target in later years, when access may have improved.

GESS remains focused on the delivery of core components at national scale, with some year-to-year variances in the locations reached, based on insecurity and access. For example, GESS reduced the milestone for the number of girls receiving Cash Transfers (CTs) from 50,000 girls to 4,000 girls in 2014, due to implementation delays caused by conflict in the first year of implementation. In subsequent years an increasingly larger number of girls have been reached, and in 2017, the programme surpassed its overall target of reaching 200,000 girls with CTs.

This shows it can take time to develop appropriate conflict-sensitive implementation modalities, but maintaining an indicator can help the programme to remain focused and ultimately deliver results.

Standardise monitoring tools

A programme that is the size of GESS will typically work with multiple different local and/or international NGOs to deliver activities at community level in FCAS contexts. Standardised monitoring tools are key to comparing data and results from different partner organisations at a central level. GESS developed standardised reporting templates for all State partners, as well as templates for workplans and budgets, which has helped to facilitate the comparability of results across States and programme coherence.

Each of GESS' State partners compiled annual and monthly work plans, inclusive of monitoring activities. Monthly workplans allowed for more flexibility to adapt planning to the changing context. Monthly reports were used as a management tool to provide feedback to GESS senior management on how to improve implementation processes. Weekly operational updates provided information on the safety of staff, assets and accessibility of the schools in relation to security and road conditions. This was collected by either e-mail or phone call and helped the programme to maintain awareness of the rapidly changing working environment.

GESS has the benefit of working with multiple technical consortium partners, who have developed specialised approaches to monitoring the quality of implementation of their respective components.

State partners were provided with standardised monitoring tools for each technical component of GESS. For example, BBC Media Action has designed tools to evaluate the effectiveness of behavioural change and Community Mobilisation activities.

Charlie Goldsmith Associates developed and continues to manage the South Sudan School Attendance Monitoring System (SSSAMS - www.sssams.org), which includes tools to collect data on Cash Transfers and Capitation Grant activities.

The GESS Secretariat monitors the implementation of quality education activities, in addition to monitoring the overall performance of State partners. At central level, data coming in through different tools could be triangulated for a more robust picture of challenges and achievements on the ground.

The challenging operational context of South Sudan and other FCAS calls for innovative approaches to data collection. GESS has made full use of technological applications for data collection including for example SMS reporting, an online enrolment database with offline data entry options and KoboCollect/Open Data Kit forms and surveys loaded on smartphones and tables. As a result, while access to data is often cited as a challenge in FCAS the programme is extremely data-rich after five years of implementation.

The use of technology requires more initial and frequent refresher training than paper-based reporting. However, the benefits of having access to data from the most remote areas of the country, that would otherwise be difficult to obtain, are significant and make this worth the investment. Some challenges remain and mainly relate to poor network, causing delays in submissions, and ensuring that programme staff on the ground have access to data after submission to inform planning at the local level as well as national level. Verification of submissions through spot checks on the ground remains very important for the reliability of reports.

Due to changing environments and high turnover of staff in FCAS, it is important to do regular refresher training on M&E tools, as well as making M&E tools easy to use and accessible to all relevant staff. This is especially pertinent when there is a range of monitoring tools employed in one programme. As well as improving the use of M&E tools, regular training on proper techniques and ethics can also help to eliminate inaccuracies and bias.

Field monitoring

Field monitoring visits in a context of conflict with ethnic dimensions should first and foremost consider the security of all those involved in a visit, including the monitoring team, partners and beneficiaries. Outsiders may be at risk and, conversely, community members may come under suspicion for talking to outsiders, especially if you plan to

explore sensitive areas with them. Certain questions may raise suspicion, so it is important to cross-check proposed questions and information with local stakeholders before involving beneficiaries in M&E activities. A diverse team of monitoring officers in which different ethnicities are represented can help to ensure monitoring coverage in all areas of implementation.

Random sampling can ensure that there is no bias towards certain groups that could aggravate the conflict. When visiting schools, GESS used random sampling and systematic clustering which has proved to be more time-efficient. This time-efficient method is particularly key in fragile environments, as areas may quickly become insecure and inaccessible. Monitors must capitalise on the time that they spend monitoring in each field location.

Fluidity in the conflict can affect schedules, so it is important to factor these considerations into planning of M&E activities. The number of days spent in the field will be determined by the nature of the work, flight schedules and road accessibility. Bearing these factors in mind, it is important to ensure a contingency plan for every mission. A security protocol should be in place in advance of any field travel as it may dictate M&E activities; certain areas may have different levels of insecurity and access, and may necessitate special arrangements. Enough time should be given for security assessment, clearance and for the necessary measures to be taken in order to secure the safety of the monitoring team.

When conducting field monitoring visits, the following factors should be considered in order to have a representative target population size and coverage, and to ensure that monitoring activities do not aggravate the fragile environment in which you are working:

- **Geographical area:** for GESS this is done in terms of considering equal frequency in visits to different geographic areas of South Sudan to ensure visits cover both rural and urban areas.
- **Management of schools:** the selection of schools to be visited considers an equal representation of ownership: government/community/private/faith based schools.
- **Gender of pupils/students/teachers:** when visiting schools and communities, specific attention should be paid to ensuring a balance between male and female respondents. Men and women/boys and girls may experience the programme interventions differently and are certainly affected by conflict in different ways. M&E visits should consider these gender dimensions and ensure data is disaggregated and includes the views of all members of the community.

The central monitoring team should also recognise that State partners implement activities in difficult conditions and therefore approach partners as a 'critical friend' rather than an 'inspector'. Monitoring visits should contribute to building an open and constructive relationship in which there is space to discuss implementation challenges, rather than hide them. This spirit of openness and trust is important because information-sharing about developments on the ground is vital for the safety and security of programme staff.

The needs of beneficiaries might change as the programme progresses, and consequently what needs to be monitored and evaluated. GESS programming was affected when conflict spread to formerly peaceful areas. Field staff were removed from such areas and based in more stable locations where they were able to continue with activities. Consequently, M&E staff did not visit these locations due to both insecurity and lack of programme activities taking place.

The involvement of government officials at State, County and Payam level can ensure safe and open access to schools in their jurisdiction. The GESS central monitoring team conducts frequent field visits together with the GESS focal points in the State Ministries of General Education and Instruction (SMoGEIs), County Education Directors (CEDs) & Payam Education Supervisors (PES). Ministry involvement leads to improved buy-in and sustainability of the programme, as well as improved security of M&E staff.

Periodic reviews

- **Annual performance review of State partners:** field monitoring reports conducted within that period and monthly reports are used to gauge the strength of the performance of each partner, and ultimately to determine if their contracts are continued. The exercise is conducted by GESS' M&E Unit, contract manager and two representatives from the MoGEI. The SAs' performance is scored and final results are validated, approved and shared with SA management on areas of improvement by the GESS top management.
- **Biannual programme review:** these meetings bring together State partners, consortium partners and the Secretariat for a weeklong workshop to share experiences, challenges and lessons learnt for the prior six months of implementation. It is the forum through which the consortium partners and Secretariat evaluate performance and discuss workplans and budgets for subsequent period.

All of our research and reports are available on our website.¹

¹ <http://girlseducationsouthsudan.org/research-reports-2>

INSPIRE EDUCATE TRANSFORM



AIM

Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) is a programme that will transform the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan – especially girls – through education. South Sudan, the newest country in the world, has some of the lowest educational indicators, with education of girls being among the lowest. Very few girls who begin primary education continue to secondary school; in 2016, 128,000 girls started primary school, but only 2,700 completed secondary school. GESS is determined to change this, so that all girls can go to school, stay in school and achieve in school.

MANAGEMENT

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The programme began in 2013, and will last until 2018.