



POLICY BRIEF

**Empower CSOs to better monitor and evaluate their pro-poor
agro food value chain activities**

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NDA
National
Development
Agency

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CSO in agro food value chains need M&E systems

CSOs that feed hungry people must know what differences the delivered food items and/or cooked meals are making to the hunger status of those intended to receive the food. This knowledge is not only crucial for how CSOs sustain themselves, but also for agencies that CSOs depend on for assistance. If a CSO knows how much its food production and distribution activities reduce hunger, it can use this knowledge for operational innovations and assist it in delivering food to larger numbers of people. Furthermore, agencies that donate money and food to CSOs or assist them with transportation, bookkeeping and other technical services also demand evidence of what their support for the CSO has achieved. It is increasingly evident that the existence and better performance of CSOs that produce and distribute food rest on their ability to continually monitor and evaluate how well they carry out such commitments.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief explores options that can be used to empower CSOs so that they are in a position to better monitor and evaluate their pro-poor agrofood value chain activities. To make sense of lessons from the recent NDA study (NDA forthcoming), it is useful to sum up a fundamental principles of M&E that CSOs will find helpful.

M&E for pro-poor AFVCs: What, why how?

M&E is a ubiquitous requirement of international donors who support these CSOs and who themselves are expected to demonstrate evidence of the impact of their support. M&E systems, which have become a universal requirement of the international donor community who support CSOs in various sectors, are argued to help the CSOs not only to harmonize their plans and strategies with their visions but also to markedly strengthen the systems and competences necessary to support their beneficiaries (Guerra-López & Hicks, 2015). For this reason, a M&E system for CSOs in agrifood value chains in South Africa can be tool that supports and permits recording and tracking of the data required to provide evidence CSOs' achievements and

challenges in attaining their objectives (Guerra-López & Hicks, 2015), particularly their contribution to poverty reduction.

Elements of a M&E for pro-poor AFVCs

A typical M&E framework would include program inputs, outputs, outcomes and overall objectives/impacts along the agrifood value chains, and in this case, through the work of CSOs. It should bring out what inputs CSOs require for them to conduct their activities along the value chains and what output they will produce from the activities they conduct. Furthermore, it also includes the expected outcomes, which are the immediate effects of the CSOs along the agrifood value chain and ultimately the impact to which these will contribute. Figure 1 illustrates the elements of a M&E system aimed at achieving pro-poor agrofood value chains, with the inclusion of CSOs in the value chains.

Figure 1: AFVC M&E for CSO

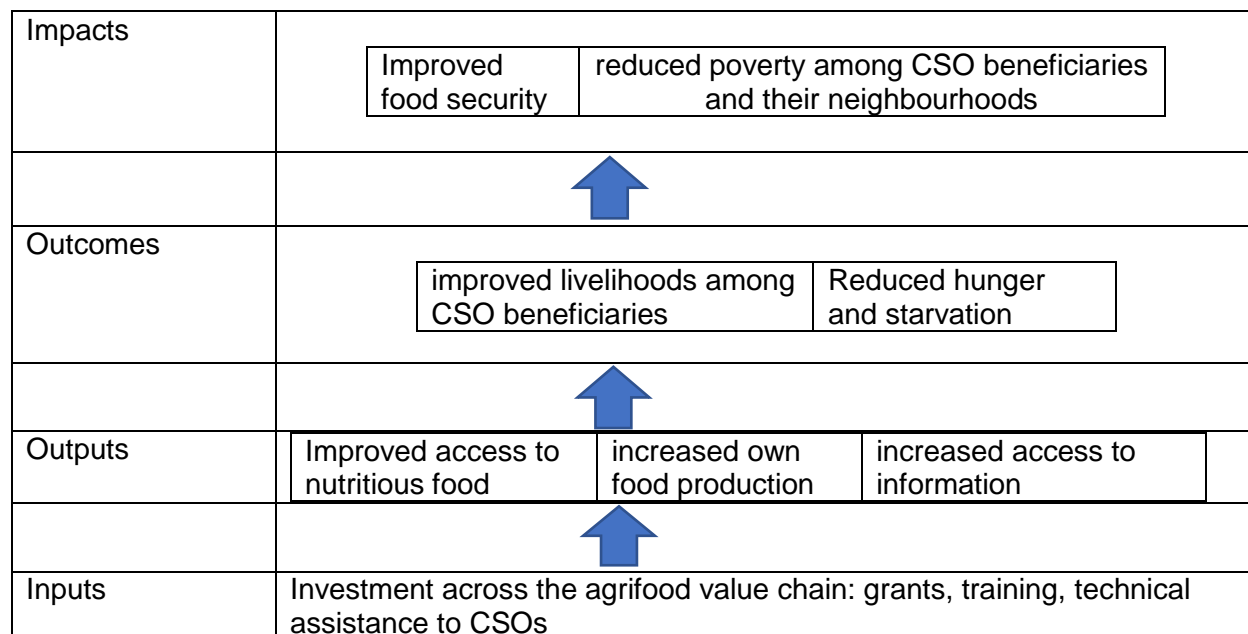


Table 1 provides a summary of what is needed for during the monitoring and evaluation stages during the implantation of M&E, including what to be monitored and evaluated in terms of outputs and impacts.

Table 1: Summary of the M&E stages, implementation, outcomes and expected impacts

Programming Phase/Stage	Monitoring	Evaluation
Implementation process	Records of CSO beneficiaries, resources received, food produced, technical assistance and training provided	Baseline data on records of CSO beneficiaries, resources received, food produced, technical assistance and training provided
Outcomes	Number of beneficiaries accessing services, number of beneficiaries producing own food, number of beneficiaries who become self-reliant	Improved livelihoods and reduction in hunger and starvation resulting from CSO activities
Impacts		Impact on food security, sustainable livelihood, and poverty in the community

To understand if activities of CSOs in agrifood value chains have an impact on their beneficiaries and the communities they operate in, the outcomes and impact of their activities need to be monitored and evaluated. Through M&E, government can monitor capacities of CSOs and determine if they have sufficient human and financial resources and technical support to play their role in agrifood value chains in line with the country’s food systems policy agendas in a way that helps to attain national and international obligations (Fanzo, et al., 2021). In Madagascar, CSOs have their own information systems to collect M&E data for promoting nutrition information, which are different from those of other stakeholders like ministries, the private sector and international organisations (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2014).

CSO M&E activities: Research Findings/insights

Evidence of CSO M&E activities (methods/applications)

Table 2 shows information on reviews conducted by CSOs aggregated into those that do processing of agrofood and those that do not do any processing. It shows that the majority of

CSOs conduct some assessment of their activities. About 52% of all CSOs conduct formal assessments, close to 35% conduct informal assessments while only 13% do not conduct any review. When the analysis taken down to aggregated agrifood value chains, it shows that CSOs in the agrofood processing segment conduct more formal assessments than those not involved only in other segments of the value chain. 55% of the CSOs in in agro processing conduct formal assessment, while 32% of them conduct informal assessments. However, for CSOs that do non-agro processing activities the picture is slightly different, with the the number of those that do formal assessments almost similar to those that conduct informal assessments, close to 43% and 42%, respectively. Table 2 also shows that the proportion of CSOs that do not any form of is almost the same among those in agro processing (13%) and in non agropossesing activities (15%).

Table 2: Formal and informal reviews conducted

	Non-agro processing	Agro processing	Total
Formal assessment	36 (42.86%)	110 (55.28%)	156 (51.59%)
Informal assessment	35 (41.67%)	64 (32.16%)	99 (34.98%)
No Assessment	13 (15.48%)	25 (12.56%)	38 (13.43%)
Total	84 (100%)	199 (100%)	283 (100%)

The next this analysis looks at reviews conducted by CSOs across, in Table 3. The province with CSOs conducting the highest number of assessments is Free State, with 38 assessments, followed by Mpumalanga with 37 while North West has the least number of assessments, at 22. Looking at the type of assessment conducted reveals that CSOs in Gauteng conducted the most formal assessments followed by Free State, with 27 and 25 assessments respectively; while North West has the lowest number of formal assessments with only 1. CSOs in Limpopo had the highest number of informal assessments (24) followed by North West CSOs with 21 informal assessments.

Table 3: Formal and informal reviews conducted, across provinces

Provinces	Formal assessment	Informal assessment	No Assessment	Total reviews
Eastern Cape	24	4	11	28
Free State	25	13	10	38
Gauteng	27	3	1	30
KwaZulu-Natal	18	10	1	28
Limpopo	12	24	1	36
Mpumalanga	18	19	5	37
North West	1	21	0	22
Northern Cape	22	2	6	24
Western Cape	24	10	6	34
Total	171	106	41	277

Status of record keeping by CSOs and the NDA

CSOs record keeping

Table 4 shows the main source of information to identify the main recipients of by CSOs aggregated into those involved in agro-processing and those in other segments of the agrofood systems. Word of mouth (which includes walk-ins) is the major source of main beneficiary identification used by CSOs, followed by self-maintained databases of CSOs, irrespective of the agrifood value chain the CSOs operate in. However, a closer look shows that for those working only in non-agro processing segments, 67% of the CSOs not involved in agro processing identify their beneficiaries through word of mouth, followed by 23% of CSOs that use their self-maintained databases and other sources. On the hand, for CSOs involved in agro processing, there is not much difference in the proportion of those that rely on self-maintained databases ad those that rely on word of mouth, at 45% and 47%, respectively.

Table 4: Main information source to identify CSO main beneficiaries

	Non-agro processing	Agro processing	Total
Self-maintained	19 (23.17)	96 (44.86)	115 (38.85)
Records of government	4 (4.88)	6 (2.80)	10 (3.38)
Statistical survey	0	1 (0.47)	1 (0.34)
CSO networks	2 (2.44)	4 (1.87)	6 (2.03)
Word of mouth	55 (67.07)	100 (46.73)	155 (52.36)
Other	2 (2.44)	7 (3.27)	9 (3.04)
Total	82 (100)	214 (100)	296 (100)

NDA record keeping

Impact evaluation can be conducted internally by a specific entity or by an independent party. Both internal and external impact evaluations are not possible without the necessary data which is reliable. Government databases on CSOs that operate along the agrifood value chains are not up to date, making an effort to evaluate the CSOs’ work impossible. Without well organised databases that comply with systematic and standardised information management procedures it is not possible from the government’s side to conduct any monitoring or evaluation of both the state’s support to CSOs. And without reliable and verifiable information on the support given to CSOs by government as well as the activities the CSOs carry out using such resources, it is difficult for government to show how it was visibly improving the lives the poor through its support to CSOs.

CSOs M&E policy actions

This section provides what needs to be done to strengthen and bolster the M&E capabilities of CSOs, before providing concise recommendations for a CSO M&E pro-poor system for agrifood value chains in South Africa.

- Coordinating existing M&E policies for CSOs along AFVCs to create an M&E system which is as simple as possible for CSOs and requires limited in data volumes, but sufficient for

CSOs to use the results as lessons learnt to improve their activities and reporting to government.

- This way, scarce resources are used efficiently to implement M&E activities by enabling CSOs to use the results as feedback for their own activities at to report to government to inform its funding decisions.
- Strengthen M&E systems by providing capacity building training on M&E tools and techniques to CSOs staff and volunteers to ensure correct data collection and analysis and to enhance record keeping skills
- CSOs reports should be used to assess quality and output of CSOs AFVC activities and services, on their beneficiaries in particular and communities in general, as a measure of the impact and effectiveness to inform future AFVCs program design and funding decisions
- Fit for purpose M&E criteria and indicators: NDA needs to work with CSOs, relevant government departments and other key stakeholders to define relevant indicators that measure AFVCs factors of interest, properly interpret the indicators and effectively use them.
- CSOs must build and use M&E tools that are compatible with and that can complement the M&E systems of state and non-state agencies that support the agrofood value chain activities of CSOs. How CSOs monitor and evaluate the improvements of their agrofood value chain activities for sustainable livelihoods is as important as the M&E activities of agencies that provide them with financial and technical assistance. Findings from this research show that government agencies that support CSOs only collect once-off information about CSOs but do not have procedures and mechanisms for at least quarterly tracking of activities.
- Invest in the capacity strengthening of CSOs so that they are able to effectively collect and use M&E information for the promotion of pro-poor agrofood value chains. This must begin

with an in-depth assessment of existing M&E capabilities and identifying the needs of CSOs in this area.

Policy recommendations

For a CSOs M&E system to work, when it is started, there is need to have an institution that plays an oversight and coordinating role, communicating with CSOs about, and introducing them to, new data recording techniques to ensure that they all record and track their data appropriately within the correct timelines.

Training for CSO personnel working on recording and tracking M&E data need training before the system is implemented, with refresher training over time as necessary.

The institution coordinating the CSO M&E system needs to monitor tracking of the required data by CSOs including expenditure, revenue, number of beneficiaries, and outcomes and impacts of their activities.

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