

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an important topic in the development domain, where Web 2.0 applications can help to share development results easier, offer new ways to measure it and get potentially more timely and accurate data. If one looks at the potential of Web 2.0 for M&E, then it is helpful to look at its different levels and tools. Information technologies have been used in the past for M&E, but the participatory web offers new ways to include more people in the process, make it more transparent and get a wider external view on a development project.

Quick and Easy: Combing data in a central spreadsheet

One easy way is the use of an online spreadsheet tool, where indicators are centrally stored and people operating out from different locations can access and add results. This allows for the most-updated data to be stored on one document accessible from everywhere. The [icollaborate blog has a nice post](#) about such a case from a South African organization.

The [spreadsheet includes](#) among others the following:

- “A worksheet with operational definitions of indicators used
- A worksheet where overall target and baseline figures were filled
- A worksheet with some graphical representations, e.g. some key results expressed as a ratio of targets, compared with the time past. See second picture.”

Such an approach allows also to add data from [other sources such as the World Bank](#) thus enabling the creation of a M&E mashup spreadsheet. New data are included in real-time, potentially from all sorts of sources. For example, percentage of Internet users can be included thanks to a [cooperation between Google and the World Bank](#)

As a follow-up step these data can be visualized through various gadgets, in diagram or map formats, and published online. Last but not least the Google spreadsheet can be extended through a question form, which delivers additional information from surveys.

The two way conversation

Monitoring and evaluation approaches often cannot rely solely on indicators such as figures. For

example, the issue of poverty is often very complex and involves many hardly quantifiable indicators. How can these be measured? One way are qualitative interviews. [One idea that the Open Source Water Alliance AKVO and the mobile reporter had](#), is to broadcast directly from the project to find out about the project success or failure. Social media or user generated content can certainly give perspective on project issues from different stakeholders. For example, project failure or success can be read by donors.

[Kiva](#)

works with direct feedback from beneficiaries, and

[Globalgiving](#)

tries to makes the most of the project process transparent and offers donors the opportunity to engage. Hopefully, we can expect more examples of a direct dialogue to prove impact. Another approach to a more transparent project cycle comes also from AKVO and is called

[Really Simple Reporting](#)

(RSR), where they “ensure that this process of monitoring and reporting stays really simple.”

Citizen monitoring

Another promising approach works through mobile phones. For example, [Stop Stock-Outs](#) collects the status of medical stocks at pharmacies and hospitals in Southern Africa. These , which are mandated by law to a maintain a minimum stock. Citizens can participate through SMS and the results are shown transparently on map in the Internet. It is done through the

[Ushahidi](#)

software, but there are

[various mobile data collection tools](#)

such as

[RapidSMS](#)

and

[FrontlineSMS](#)

, which can be used to collect statistics from anywhere, for example, by health workers.

Another approach is taken by the [Citizen Water Initiative](#) , which hands out low-cost water testing kits to obtain water quality results across a country. Residents of different locations can make use the kits and are offered easy ways to upload and share the results.

These examples show the different ways to approach monitoring and evaluation through Web 2.0 applications. Although these may have their own limitations, they can certainly enhance the transparency and offer new channels to include different perspectives on project progress, not possible before, and complement frequently inaccurate and unsatisfactory data sets.

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