



Let's suppose that your work involves managing a social program that is ready on paper. The implementation phase is just beginning. You have participated in planning the program, you are sure of a few goals and objectives, and you have an idea of how the program should impact the social situation. Nevertheless, some questions still need to be addressed. How will you know if the program will work as planned? How will you deal with unforeseen issues? It is of course essential to draw up an action plan, but there is no way to be sure that everything will turn out as planned. All this calls for a need to monitor the program. The following explains the key concepts used for monitoring social policies in Brazil.

WHAT IS MONITORING?

Monitoring consists of tracking a program continuously or at regular intervals. It is done by collecting and systematically analysing data on program execution in order to check whether the program is being implemented in accordance with the expected standards, goals and targets planned at the outset.

But how can we know if the activities are proceeding as planned if we lack the means to rate their progress? How can we make decisions on implementation if we have no access to information about how the implementation process is progressing? How can we improve the actions if we are unaware of how they are developing?

Monitoring is a way of enhancing the manager's knowledge of the program implementation process, enabling him/her better to manage the available resources, correct discrepancies or resolve problems that may arise throughout the entire process.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

While monitoring and evaluation systems both help to bring about improvements in social programs, they are in fact two different concepts. Monitoring involves the program manager in tracking the actual development of the activities. He seeks to obtain and analyse information on the activities with a view to improving them. Meanwhile, evaluation concerns the manager determining the impacts of a program.

» Monitoring is the continuous tracking of the development of a program aligned to its goals and objectives. Monitoring seeks to generate accurate information on the operation of the program and systematically checks how the activities, their products and results are progressing as compared to pre-set parameters.

» Evaluation is the analysis of the effects of the program to determine whether the program has generated the planned changes. Evaluation is not continuous, but is performed sporadically.

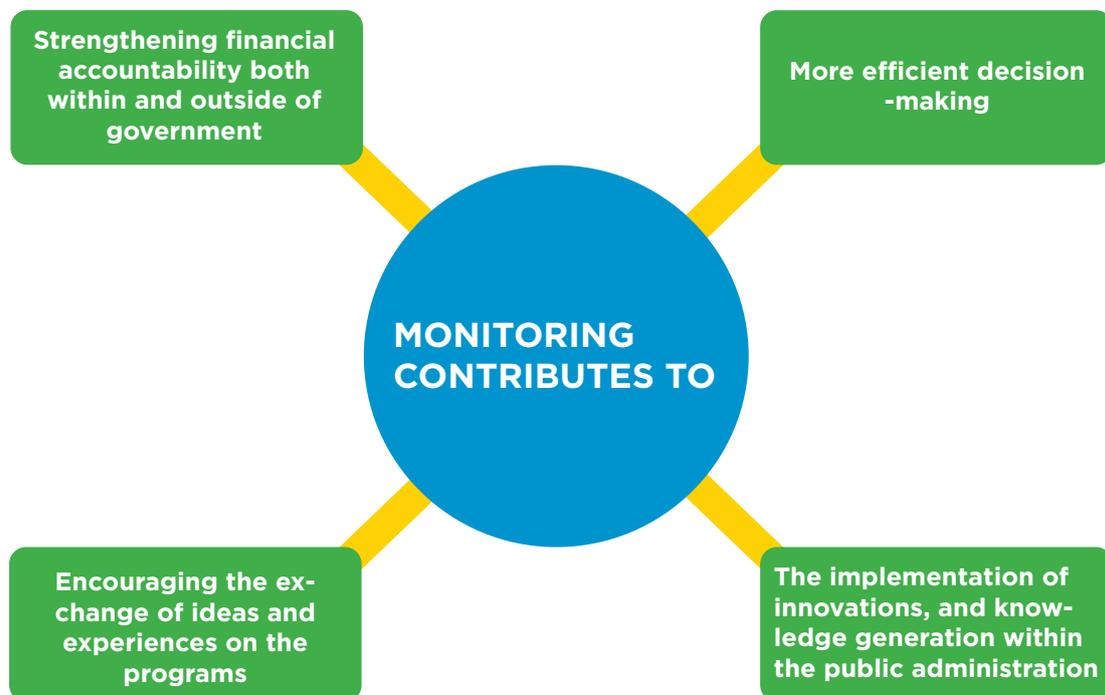
Another feature that differentiates monitoring from evaluation is related to **results**. Monitoring focuses on the production of information, on data collection and on observing actions to ensure that people and organizations are performing the activities planned at the program design stage. On the other hand, the evaluation of all this data and information is intended to provide the basis for determining the impacts of the program. The main role of evaluation is thus to determine whether the program has succeeded in effecting the planned changes.

Monitoring and evaluating are therefore complementary processes: while monitoring reports on the operation of programs, evaluation is concerned with analysing whether the expected social changes have been achieved.

HOW IMPORTANT IS MONITORING FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS?

Monitoring seeks to improve the implementation stage of programs. Its main goal is to ensure that the results set forth at the planning stage will be achieved. Monitoring assumes that during the program implementation process, problems, obstacles and unforeseen events will arise that were not apparent at the planning stage. The information produced by monitoring is a tool to assist the manager to identify these situations and find appropriate solutions. Monitoring therefore involves a number of different attributes:

- » **To contribute to the efficiency of a program**, by helping to enhance its implementation, to make maximum use of the resources available, and to reduce costs.
- » **To ensure data transparency and strengthen communication**, by informing different stakeholders (practitioners, partners and the general public) on the situation of the program and to describe how the actions are progressing. Monitoring can shed light on successful activities as well as on problems that frequently occur during implementation.
- » **To guide, review and adjust program development:** monitoring is a management and learning tool that contributes to reflection on, and adaptation of, program strategies.



The strategies used by Brazil to undertake the monitoring of social programs are addressed in the following texts.

Source:

BRAZIL. Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger; Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. **Caderno de Estudos do Curso em Conceitos e Instrumentos para o Monitoramento de Programas**. Brasília: SAGI; SNAS, 2014.