Capacity Assessment

Of Monitoring And Evaluation
Departments In Syrian Organizations

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A chance of improvement

About INDICATORS

INDICATORS is a limited liability company, specialized in the field of statistical studies and field research, with specialists in field research methodologies, samples, questionnaires development and data analysis. INDICATORS was established in 2017 in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, its field teams cover both Syria and the neighboring countries (Turkey - Lebanon - Jordan - Iraq), in addition to the European Union countries.

INDICATORS provides its services in the fields of:
1. Market research: market analysis, product development, marketing studies, customer experience testing, and customer satisfaction studies.
2. MEAL & TPM: needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian projects, impact analysis, in addition to developing standard operating procedures (**SOPs**) and systems of accountability to affected populations.
3. Socio-politics: polls, academic studies, and societal development studies.

INDICATORS has provided services to many local and international institutions including Syrian, Arab and international organizations, in addition to establishing research.

Terminology

Information Security

Data Protection and Cyber Security

NGO

an independent humanitarian organization that are not officially affiliated with any government

KVKK

Turkish Personal Information Protection Law

PSEA

means Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse

GDPR

European personal data protection system

CRM

Complaints Response Mechanism

ISO

International Quality Standards

AAP

Accountability to Affected People **Populations**

Executive Summary

Monitoring and Evaluation Department is considered one of the most important departments in **NGOs**, as it has an essential role in all phases of the project, starting from the planning of activities through assessing the needs of the targeted beneficiaries of the organization's activities, and during the implementation phase and field follow-up, and even after the project ends through the process of final evaluation of the project and its impact assessment, and concluding lessons learned that can contribute to designing and developing future projects that the organization intends to implement, in addition to the role of the department in raising the degree of donors' confidence in the organization.

Given the importance of the work of the **M&E** department in **NGOs**, we conducted this study, which aims to identify the situation of the work of the M&E departments in Syrian organizations operating in Turkey, the extent to which these departments are organized, the existence of policies and **SOP's** guides, its effectiveness within the organization and their relationship with the rest of the organization's departments, in addition to identifying the expertise and competencies that workers of these departments possess and their most important training needs. The study included **20** Syrian organizations located in both Gaziantep and Istanbul.

The study showed that the work of **M&E** departments in the majority of Syrian **NGOs** is limited to monitoring and evaluation only, without having a role in the accountability or learning process, and employees of these departments suffer a lack of expertise, especially expertise related to reports reporting, quality standards for questionnaires, sampling methodologies and **PSEA**, also, the vast majority of organizations lack policies and SOPs guides, in addition to the weak relationship and coordination between the M&E departments and the programs departments in about half of the organizations.

Accordingly, we stress the necessity for the executive managements in each of the Syrian **NGOs** to conduct a capacity assessment for the **M&E** department in the organization, to identify the department's weaknesses and to work to strengthen them, and to provide the department's employees with training courses to develop their skills, and to work on preparing policies and **SOPs** guides for the work of the M&E department. We also recommend raising the awareness of the employees of the organization in all departments of the importance of the work of the **M&E** department, and for this end, the results of the M&E department's work can be periodically presented.

Methodology of the Study

First- Objective of the Study:
The study aims to evaluate the M&E departments in Syrian NGOs operating in Turkey and the competence and functionality of these departments by:
1. Defining the role of the M&E department within the organizations and the tasks assigned to it.
2. identifying the expertise and skills that M&E department staff possess, and identify the training and capacity building programs they need.
3. Knowing the extent of availability of policies and SOPs guides in Syrian humanitarian organizations in general and in the M&E department in particular.
4. Determining the nature and form of the relationship between the M&E department and other departments of the organization.

Second- Scope of the Study:
Time frame:
The study was conducted during October and November **2021**.
Geographical scope:
The study has included a number of the NGOs operating in Gaziantep and Istanbul provinces.

Third- Sample of the Study:
The study has included 20 medium and major Syrian NGOs, as the managers and employees of M&E departments in these NGOs were interviewed, and their policies and SOPs guides were reviewed.

General Concept of Monitoring and Evaluation

The idea of monitoring and evaluation is very similar to the idea of quality management, as the quality management department in companies works to ensure the quality of the products and services provided by the company, which increases its chances of success and enhances customers' confidence in it, and by analyzing the role of the M&E department in organizations, we find that it is similar to that. It can also be said that the evolution of the role of monitoring and evaluation was consistent with the development of the role of quality management, as quality science began with the concept of examination, which focuses on examining the final product upon the completion of its production, which corresponds to the evaluation of the project, then quality evolved into quality control, which can be very clearly similar to project monitoring, then we witnessed the development towards quality assurance and comprehensive quality management, which are consistent with the concepts of learning and accountability, especially accountability in its comprehensive concept.

By analyzing the quality standards we find that they are very similar to the standards of accountability in its comprehensive concept, (and not only accountability to the affected populations), there is a slight difference related to the product development standard, which is not found in accountability because it does not focus on the principle of the product, but rather on the beneficiaries.

finally, we can say that the comprehensive concept of the M&E department, with the existence of learning and accountability tasks, this department plays the role of controlling the quality of the organization's work, and ensuring that no mistakes are committed, in addition to the more comprehensive role that the department plays as a continuous development tool for humanitarian intervention, restructuring and internal institutional development of the organization.

Roles of Monitoring and Evaluation Department

Specialists and consultants in the field of MEAL can notice that there is an overlap in the tasks of the M&E department with the tasks of other departments, and that there is a transfer of some responsibilities from the **M&E** department to other departments or vice versa.

In some organizations that are larger than medium scale, we find that the tasks of accountability and learning have been separated in order to be conducted by a separate department or an independent office within the department (and this is mostly seen in international organizations), or we may find that some organizations have obtained ISO certificates, in this case, we might find that this role is assigned to an independent department other than M&E department.

On the other hand, in some organizations, we find that the **M&E** department bears responsibilities that are not completely related to it, but as a result of the relatedness of those responsibilities to the specialty of monitoring and evaluation and the low number of the staff of the organization, these tasks are assigned to it. The most important responsibilities and tasks assigned to the M&E department can be summarized as **follows:**

1. Monitoring and evaluation.
2. Learning.
3. Complaints: If accountability is applied, they are then a part of its standards, but we find that many organizations do not implement accountability and have a complaints response system (CRM).
4. Accountability: **It is divided into two levels:**
a.Accountability to Affected people (**AAP**), which focuses on accountability to stakeholders, without changing the organization's structure and staff...
b.Accountability in its comprehensive concept, which is similar to the concept of comprehensive quality management, and we find in its standards something similar to the restructuring of the organization.
5.PSEA: protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.
6.Personal information security: In Turkey, the Turkish system for the security of personal information (**KVKK**) is adopted, which is derived from the European **GDPR** system.
7.Data management: In the ideal situation, this task is assigned to an independent department, but mostly, we either find it assigned to the **M&E** department or the organization has no data management activity.
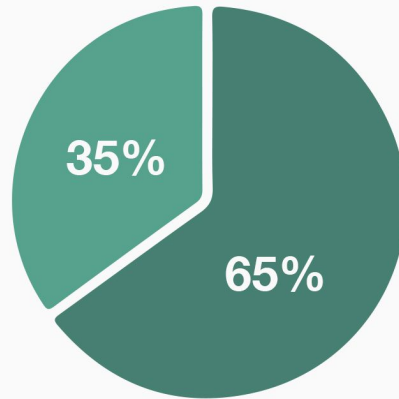
Tasks of Monitoring and Evaluation Department

There are many tasks of the **MEAL** department in **NGOs**; in general, this department undertakes monitoring tasks, which are mainly to follow up the implementation of project activities, verifying their quality, the progress made in implementing activities, and the extent to which the organization's teams adhere to the project plan and implementation timetable. The M&E department also carries out all types of evaluation required for the organization's workflow, including (needs assessment – initial evaluation – periodic evaluations of the implemented projects – final evaluation of projects – impact assessment... etc.).

Many organizations have worked on developing their **M&E** departments and expanding their activities to include both accountability and learning as well as monitoring and evaluation, as the department seeks to open effective channels of communication with beneficiaries and stakeholders, receives complaints and provides feedback, in addition to other activities related to accountability that contribute to strengthening transparency within the organization, in addition to concluding lessons learned and success stories, and documenting the risks faced by the project and how they were dealt with.

Looking at the study sample, we notice that about a third of the organizations have worked on developing the **M&E** department to perform accountability and learning tasks along with monitoring and evaluation work, while we find that the work of the **M&E** department in the largest percentage of organizations is limited to carrying out monitoring and evaluation tasks only, and here we would like To emphasize the need for the executive managements of organizations to pay more attention to the importance of the role of the M&E department and to make more efforts to develop the department and expand its tasks to include both accountability and learning, which contributes to developing the projects that are being implemented and increasing the quality of the implemented activities and avoiding the recurrence of mistakes that may occur during implementation.

is it MEAL department or only
a monitoring and evaluation department

■ MEAL   ■ M&E

The limitation of the work of the **M&E** Department to performing monitoring and evaluation tasks is due to many reasons; first, the reason for this is the low expertise and skills possessed by the department's employees, which hinders their ability to carry out the tasks of accountability and learning, and on the other hand is due to the insufficient number of **M&E** team members, which prevents the department from undertaking additional tasks, which we notice by looking at the study sample organizations, as the largest percentage of those organizations do not have a sufficient number of employees in the **M&E** department, and in general, the most important things that executive managements of the organizations must do is to identifying the weaknesses of their **M&E** departments and working to strengthen them, whether by subjecting the department's employees to training courses and capacity building programs, or by hiring additional employees.
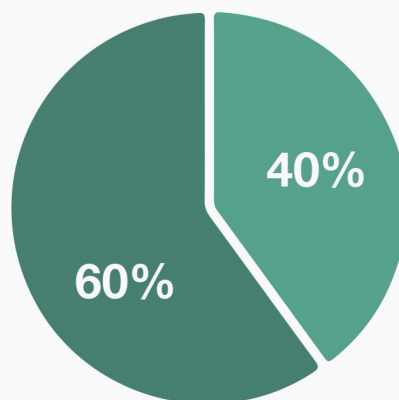
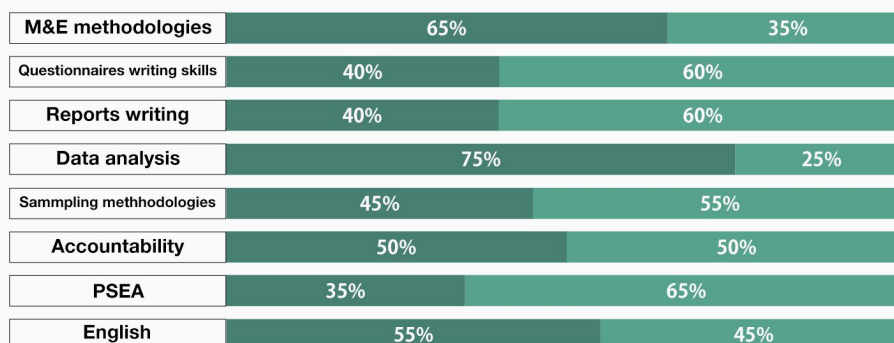## Departments staff number

■ Sufficient   ■ Insufficient

Experience and Competencies of M&E Departments' Staffs

In general, the employees of the M&E department in all organizations possess good competencies and skills that enable them to carry out the department's daily tasks, but the largest percentage of the employees need to develop their capacities and expertise, as only 30% of the monitoring and evaluation employees in the organizations covered by the study have advanced skills in the field of MEAL.

There are many training needs for the staff of the M&E departments, as their need for receiving trainings on protection skills and dealing with cases of sexual exploitation and abuse PSEA is dire, and their need for advanced trainings in the field of monitoring and evaluation reports writing, questionnaires writing skills, knowledge of questionnaires quality standards, and sampling methodologies is also dire, in addition, nearly half of the cadres of the organizations covered by the study need trainings on accountability and learning, in addition to the need of some of these cadres to develop English language skills and data analysis.

Skills of the M&E department employees

Skill	Don't need development	Need development
M&E methodologies	65%	35%
Questionnaires writing skills	40%	60%
Reports writing	40%	60%
Data analysis	75%	25%
Sammpling methhodologies	45%	55%
Accountability	50%	50%
PSEA	35%	65%
English	55%	45%

■ Need development ■ Don't need development

Work Systems
Policies and SOPs Guides

The optimal performance of all NGOs' employees of their tasks requires the existence of work policies that accurately describe the tasks of each of them and the objectives that must be achieved, in addition to the presence of procedures guides that explain the method and mechanism of carrying out tasks and complying with the policies, and given that the tasks of the M&E department include: Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, learning, complaints, data management, PSEA cases management, and personal data protection.

By analyzing the key findings of the study, we notice that most of the activities that have both; policies and procedures guides at the same time are complaints at a percentage of 50% of the study sample organizations, and the percentage of organizations that have policies and procedures guides for monitoring and evaluation is also considered acceptable, while the percentage of organizations that do not have policies or procedures guides for accountability, learning, data management, personal information security, and PSEA is extremely high.

Policies and procedures guides

M&E Department	25%	25%	25%	25%
Complaints	50%		20%	30%
Accountability	25%	10%	65%	
Learning	10%	90%		
PSEA	15%	10%	75%	
KVKK	15%	5%	80%	
Data Management	10%	5%	85%	

- ■ There are policies and a procedures guide
- ■ There is a policy and a procedures guide but they need development
- ■ There are policies but there are no procedures guide
- ■ None

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The Relationship of the M&E Department with the Departments of the Organization

The work of the M&E department overlaps with the work of all departments of the organization, and the relationship between the work of the M&E department and the programs department is the most important and overlapping, as the programs department implements project activities, and at the same time the M&E department works to follow up the implementation of those activities and ensure that the implementation is carried out according to the timetable and in the planned method, and that the project's resources are optimally used. The M&E department also seeks during its work to identify the project's strengths and works to strengthen them, in addition to detecting weaknesses and working to avoid them, in addition to anticipating any risks that may occur, with concluding the lessons learned.

In fact, the quality and degree of coordination between the M&E department and the programs department varies from one organization to another, and in some cases may even vary within the same organization from one project to another. In some organizations, the relationship between the two departments is characterized by peering and discordance, along with a sort of sensitivity resulted from misunderstanding the role of the M&E department, which is sometimes seen as an inspection department, or by the presence of tossing of responsibilities between the employees of the two departments as a result of the overlapping of tasks and the lack of clarity of responsibilities. On the other hand, we find that that the relationship between the two departments in some of the organizations is extremely good and is based on integration and mutual coordination to carry out activities optimally, which leads to an increase in the quality of the outputs, and an increase in the confidence of donors in the work of the organization.
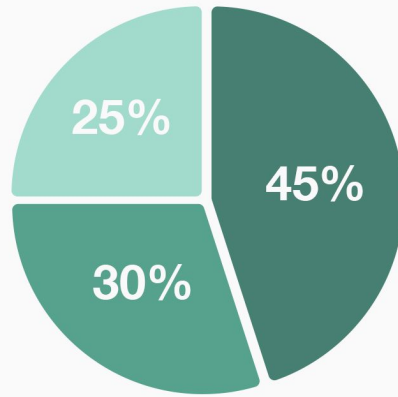
Coordination between the programs department and the M&E department

■ Needs development ■ Good ■ Very good

On the other hand, it is necessary to tackle the extent of independence of the MEAL department from the other departments of the organization. In some cases, it was found that the M&E department was not independent, but was included as a part of the programs department, or that although it was an independent department, the outputs of its work were directed to the programs department and not to the senior management and donors.

The independence of the M&E department increases its effectiveness in following up on project activities and identifying weaknesses of implementation, and ensures the neutrality of the department, which increases donors' confidence in the monitoring and evaluation reports that the organization prepares, and thus helps improve their classification of the organization. The key findings of the study showed that the M&E departments of nearly a third of the organizations covered by the study are not independent, but are annexed to the programs department, which is the problem that is recommended to be addressed.
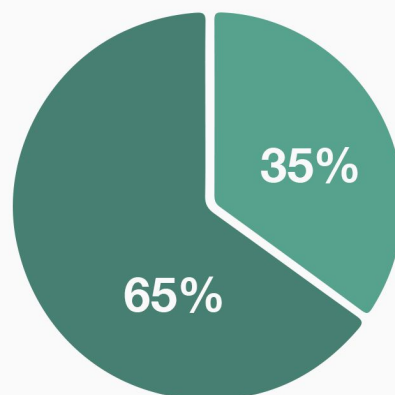
Is the department administratively independent

■ Yes ■ No

Key Findings

1. The M&E department in many Syrian **NGOs** carries out tasks that do not fall within the framework of monitoring and evaluation. As in addition to monitoring, evaluation, accountability, learning and complaints management, the department performs data management processes and applies personal information security systems, it performs these tasks due to the lack of sufficient budgets for covering the salaries of employees in those specialties.

2. The **M&E** department performs monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (**MEAL**) tasks in only about one third of the organizations covered by the study, while its work is limited to monitoring and evaluation tasks in two thirds of these organizations.

3. The number of employees in the M&E department is insufficient in about two-thirds of the organizations covered by the study.

4. The skills of employees of **M&E** departments are somewhat low, especially skills related to reports writing, questionnaires writing skills, sampling methodologies and PSEA.

5. The vast majority of organizations lack work policies and SOPs guides for data management, personal information security, learning, accountability and **PSEA**.

6. Coordination processes between the M&E department and the programs department need improvement in about half of the organizations covered by the study.

7. The **M&E** department lacks independence in one third of the organizations, as the M&E team reports to the programs department or is not independent from the programs department in carrying out its work.

Recommendations

1. Targeting the staffs of M&E departments with capacity-building courses, especially those related to reports writing, questionnaires quality standards, sampling methodologies, and **PSEA**.

2. Working on preparing policies and SOPs guides for the work of the M&E departments. It is preferable that the application of policies and SOPs guides be supervised to ensure their correct application and the commitment of the department staff to a unified work system.

3. The necessity of ensuring the independence of the **M&E** department of the organization, and that it reports directly to the executive management to ensure the independence of its work and the transparency of the organization before its donors.

4. The **M&E** department staff must convey a perspective of the department's role confirming that its role is to contribute to the development of humanitarian work and support the programs department to implement humanitarian projects successfully. To achieve this, the staff of the department needs to be trained, especially data collection teams, on soft skills and the message that the team conveys when implementing monitoring and evaluation processes.

5. Working on improving coordination between the **M&E** department and other departments, especially the programs department, and this is usually done through coordinating the work for the projects starting from the commencement of working on the project idea and the proposal, and permanent coordination and informing the M&E department about the activities implemented by the programs department.

6. Working on developing the M&E departments to move from the level of performing monitoring and evaluation tasks only to include the tasks of learning and accountability, and thus, these department would achieve an important role in developing the work of the organization and increasing the impact of its humanitarian intervention.

7. The need to search for methods and develop procedures that help organizations to overcome the crisis of the lack of workers in the department in light the lack of sufficient support to increase their number, this can be done by developing work procedures and redistributing tasks in a way that speeds up the implementation of tasks and reduces waste of efforts.

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