

Impact Brief Series, Issue 3

Help Leads to Hope

Somalia

The Taqem (“evaluation” in Arabic) Initiative is a technical cooperation programme of the International Labour Organization and regional partners including Silatech, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. Taqem applies an iterative cycle of capacity development, impact research and policy influence to improve evidence on “what works” in youth employment and to support youth employment stakeholders make evidence-based decisions to improve resource allocation and programme design.

The Taqem Impact Brief Series documents how organizations measure outcomes of their youth employment programmes, the tools that are applied and the findings and recommendations that emerge to assist them in improving impacts and programme design. The organizations profiled in the Impact Brief Series form a Community of Practice, a collaborative approach to building capacity on monitoring, evaluation (M&E) and impact evaluation and foster learning and cooperation among youth serving organizations.

KEY MESSAGES

- The knowledge, skills, and lessons learned from basic monitoring activities provide a solid foundation on which more complex evaluations can be built.
- It is important to keep the M&E system simple and data collection requirements in line with the organizational capacity.
- Pilot testing of data collection instruments is critical to understand local sensitivities in providing personal information.
- For small-scale operations, Microsoft Excel can be used to record monitoring and evaluation data. However, it is important to consider the eventual volume of data, how it will be managed, and by whom.

*How a basic monitoring system
can foster learning, accountability,
and improve service delivery
in a fragile environment*



Background

Help Leads to Hope (HLH) is a non-governmental organization based in Bossaso, Somalia, which delivers humanitarian services to marginalized populations in the Puntland region. In 2012, HLH introduced a one-year programme to train 380 young people aged 18–35 in fishing skills called the Fishing Sector Livelihood Programme for Youth. Beneficiaries of this programme learn one of a range of core skills which form the fishing industry value chain, including artisanal fishing, deep-sea fishing, fish processing and conserving procedures, boat and engine maintenance, and the marketing of marine products. A four-month cycle of theoretical training and practical learning provides youth with the knowledge needed to set up new small businesses. Beneficiaries are paid a small stipend into a bank account set up in their name, which helps them understand banking processes and how to save. Following the completion of training, beneficiaries are offered machinery and equipment needed to set up their own small business.

Taqeem support

When HLH joined the Taqeem Initiative, the organization lacked a strategy and a plan for monitoring and evaluation. Data were being collected on a few key output indicators, but little outcome information was available. The Fishing Sector Livelihood Programme for Youth presented a good opportunity to pilot a comprehensive M&E system given it was a new project and HLH could start from scratch in its development.

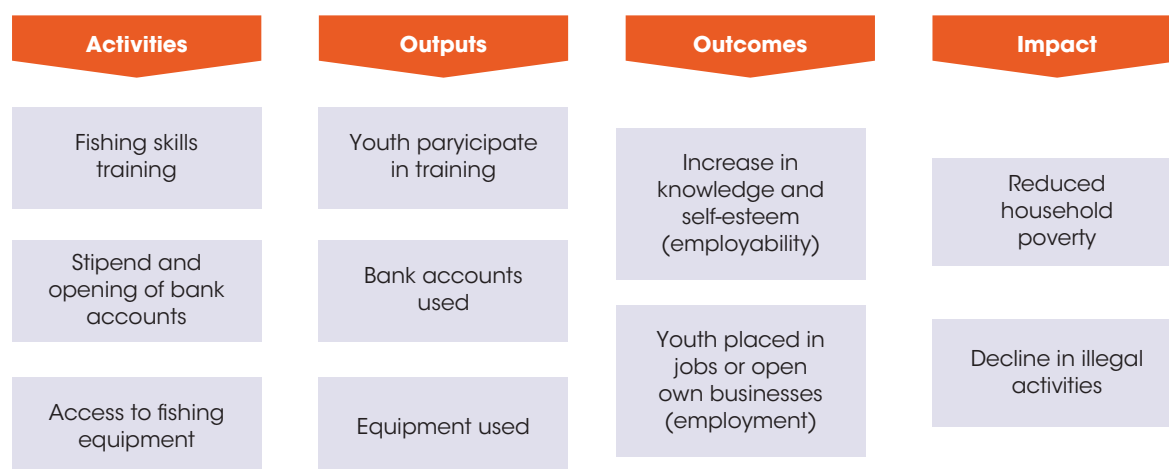
Before HLH could start planning the basic framework of a new M&E system, it needed to understand its readiness and ability to conduct M&E. There was a clear mandate from its donors at the Education Development Center and the United States African Development Fund who demanded more attention to results measurement. However, the HLH team had little knowledge and experience with M&E before joining Taqeem. M&E processes were largely set up to respond to requests for donor reporting. Each HLH activity collected data using different tools, and the organization had no central repository for all the data collected. Moreover, HLH lacked the resources to set up a rigorous M&E system. Based on early assessments, HLH and Taqeem decided to start by building the M&E skills and knowledge among HLH staff, while injecting technical and financial support into the M&E system to make up for a lack of resources.

M&E system

Results chain

The fishing skills programme was designed following the old proverb, “Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” The aim of the fishing skills programme is to teach beneficiaries a new set of skills and attitudes for jobs and business which will provide them with livelihood options, as well as to empower them in terms of self-esteem (figure 1). By providing youth with the opportunity to work, start a business, and earn money, HLH expects to help them move out of poverty and provide basic needs for their families.

FIGURE 1. Overview of the results chain for HLH’s fishing skills program



Data collection instruments

Working with Taqeem, the HLH team developed a number of instruments for capturing outputs and outcomes related to the fishing skills programme. Given the lack of human resources HLH could dedicate

to M&E, the quantity and the frequency of data collection was kept to a minimum. The data collection tools were designed to be intuitive and fit to the design of the programme. Table 1 summarizes the principal data collection tools and indicators they measure.

Figure 2 shows HLH’s data collection cycle, starting with the application form (before the training) and ending with the last follow-up survey (six months after the training ends). For a given cycle (cohort) in the fishing skills programme, which lasts three months, a full M&E cycle, from beginning to end, therefore lasts nine months. It is worth noting that all data collection instruments were translated from English to Somali to ensure appropriate understanding by the beneficiaries.¹

TABLE 1. Description of the data collection tools and main indicators of the M&E system for fishing skills

Instrument	Main indicators measured by the instrument	Description
Application form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of applicants to programme ■ Socio-demographic information such as household income, assets, education level and work experience 	Paper application form with 10 questions to capture the socio-economic situation of the applicant. The questions are used to provide an indication of the likely poverty level. Once completed, the M&E Officer is responsible for manually entering data into an Excel data sheet
Self-esteem form and interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Attitude towards employment ■ Motivation to get a job ■ Level of self-esteem 	Paper form completed by the M&E Officer during face-to-face interviews. The form contains 10 statements scored on a Likert scale. ¹ The form is administered before the training starts (as part of the screening process) as well as after training completion. All the data are entered manually into an Excel data sheet by the M&E officer
Pre- and post-training technical skills tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Level of technical knowledge on fishing skills and practices 	A set of five paper-based, multiple-choice questions on technical aspects of fishing covered by the curriculum. All participants take the skills test at the start of the programme and again at the end. Results are used to confirm a pass mark to the training
Endline, 3-month, and 6-month follow-up surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Share of graduates securing a job after 3–6 months ■ Share of graduates starting their own enterprises after 3–6 months ■ Poverty likelihood at endline and after 3–6 months 	Paper forms administered by the M&E Officer at graduation as well as 3 and 6 months thereafter. The same questions are used as in the application form in order to be able to measure change in poverty. Questions on employment status and self-esteem are also asked. The M&E Officer is responsible for entering all of the data on the forms into the Excel data sheet

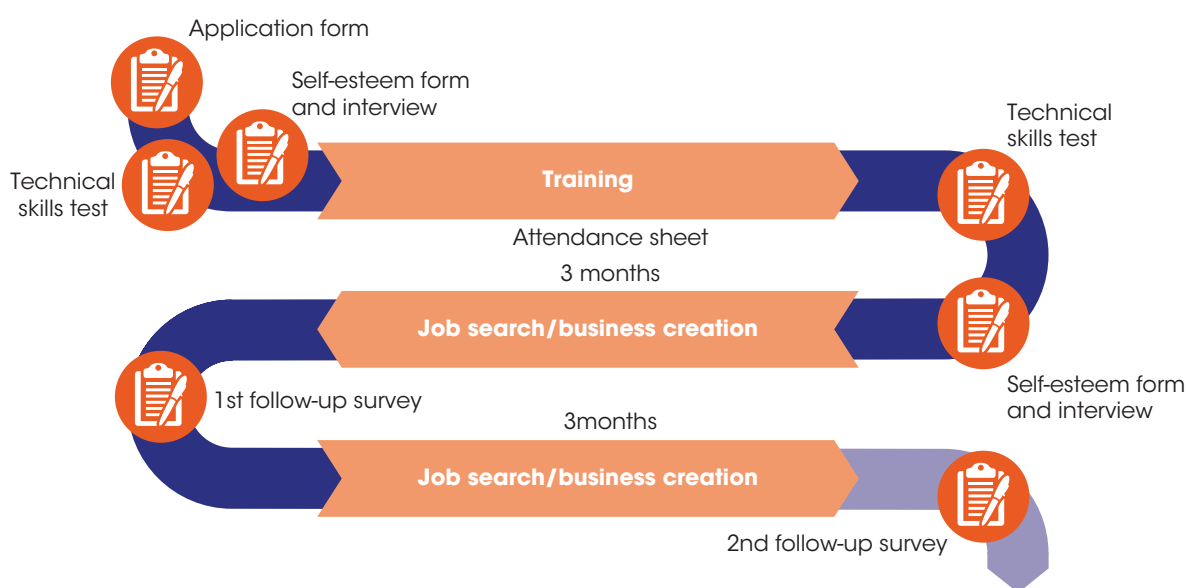
¹ A Likert scale is a widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research.

Data management

HLH's dependence on paper-based forms and manual data entry when conducting their M&E is very time consuming. Indeed, all data are entered manually into a master Excel spreadsheet where analysis is performed. While a web-based or database solution would have been preferable, it was not deemed feasible due to the lack of IT equipment and reliable internet connection.

The spreadsheet has become the backbone of HLH's M&E system. The sheet was set up to automate recording and analysis processes allowing many of the HLH staff to make use of it after receiving training. A series of videos, training manuals, and instructions was created to provide an always-on source of guidance on the use of the tool. As such, the solution provided to HLH has been appropriate to the conditions in which they are operating and has enabled them to establish a useful tool for monitoring programme outcomes.

FIGURE 2. Overview of the data collection workflow of the M&E system for the Fishing Skills project

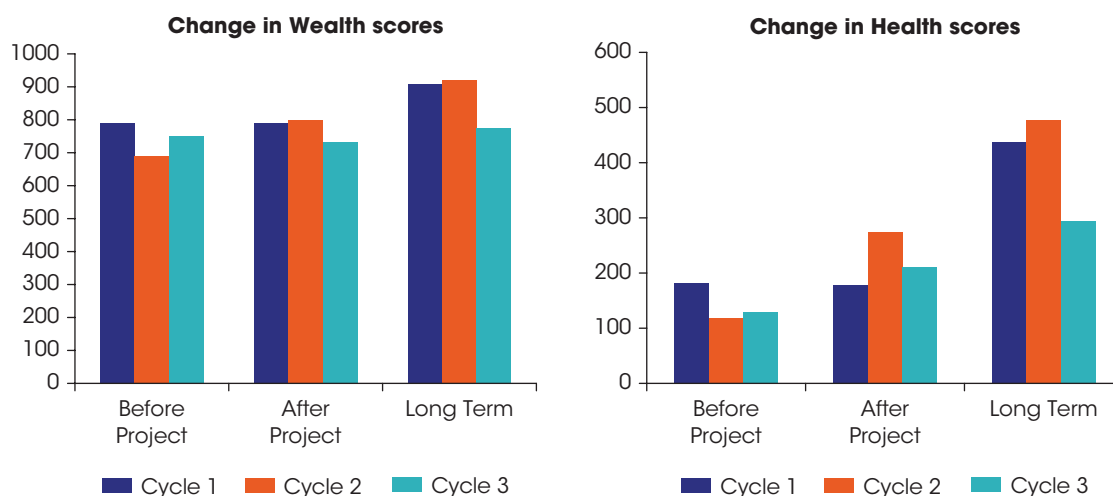


M&E results

The M&E system designed provides some interesting initial results. Three cycles of the programme were completed in 2012–13 with a total of 379 beneficiaries participating in the training. Data on these beneficiaries show the following:

- **Gender balance:** 88 per cent of participants were male. The imbalance was driven by the focus on the fishing sector which is dominated by men, as well as cultural constraints which allow women to participate only in specific types of training. This situation is unlikely to change in future cycles.
- **Dropout:** The dropout rate was just over 2 per cent over the course of the three training cycles.
- **Knowledge:** 100 per cent of students passed the post-training skills test.

FIGURE 3. Changes in wealth and health status outcomes among beneficiaries



- **Employment:** 100 per cent of graduating students secured employment after the programme, either by finding a job or setting-up their own business. This was a huge success, given Somalia’s climate not being conducive to learning outside, and the limited number of employers in the area.
- **Poverty:** Data indicate a 26 per cent increase in the number of beneficiary households with access to electricity, private latrines, and filtered water.

Based on the pre- and post-training survey, positive changes in the beneficiary’s wealth and health status could be observed (figure 3). Wealth scores improved by 10–30 per cent, while health scores saw improvements of over 100 per cent on average. However, since only monitoring data are available without a reliable counterfactual,² one cannot be sure that these positive changes are (fully) attributable to the intervention.

² A counterfactual is a theoretical construct that refers to what would have happened in the absence of the intervention; it is usually captured using a comparable control group not benefiting from the program.

Lessons learned

Keep it simple

It is important to align the complexity of an M&E system with organizational capacity, considering that collecting too much data will be costly and require a lot of time to analyze. A limited number of data collection tools and indicators proved sufficient for a small organization like HLH. The original M&E system design at HLH included elements which were not practical when it came to implementation; ideas like offering beneficiaries the opportunity to provide feedback via SMS, or collecting additional data from other household members were never implemented for this reason. The core theme of the M&E design was to provide a credible indication that the programme impacted livelihoods and helped beneficiaries move out of poverty. This has been achieved with a reduced set of instruments and basic data analysis.

Build capacity for data management

The person responsible for managing data should receive appropriate training in data management and analysis. Otherwise, data collection and management will quickly become a burden for the organization. Our experience of HLH shows that analyzing increasing amounts of data in Excel sheets is not easy. The creation of pivot tables and formulas was required to extract the required information and avoid calculating the scores manually. As the amounts of data grew, the formulas and pivot table definitions often required adjustment. These operations required an understanding of the more complex elements of Excel.

Test instruments to account for local sensitivities

When collecting data, it is important to consider local sensitivities, customs and culture in order to ensure that the beneficiary groups feel comfortable giving requested information. As soon as they feel uncomfortable with the questions, they may demur or simply provide inaccurate answers. Pilot testing of data collection tools is crucial to understand what questions will cause a problem, and allows evaluators to adjust the instruments and adapt the

selection of indicators before their launch. In the case of HLH, information about employment and self-employment was collected immediately following the graduation, but data collection during the follow-up surveys was difficult because most of the beneficiaries refused to openly answer some of the questions. In particular, beneficiaries did not feel comfortable providing information related to personal income or family affairs. Similarly, the self-esteem form data were not collected after the baseline, and therefore could not be used to analyze potential changes in this regard.

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Next steps

Refining the M&E system

HLH's M&E instruments need to be adjusted to account for the cultural and regional sensitivities in answering certain questions and to better fit its learning priorities. In particular, some of the sensitive questions have to be removed from the survey questionnaires and not pursued during focus groups. Priority must be given to the questions that are providing evidence on key outcomes.

Adapting the M&E system to new implementation sites

HLH's original fishing skills programme finished after one year of implementation. In its place, a new programme focused on teaching a broader set of technical and vocational skills to rural youth is to be delivered using the same approach and M&E system, with slight changes to adapt it to the new context. For instance, new questions were added regarding the families' livestock and dairy production. HLH would also like to move to a more robust, cloud-based M&E system if internet connectivity keeps improving.

Leveraging the results

A key objective going forward is to use collected data to assess the performance of each area of the programme and improve the quality of delivery. Feedback from beneficiaries will also provide insight into new ways in which the programme can deliver additional value. Further analysis of the data will also be used to produce high-level information for donor reports, outreach campaigns, and the organization's website.

Becoming a centre of excellence

HLH wishes to become a center of excellence for M&E in the Bassoso region and possibly all of Somalia. Leveraging the capacity building received and experience acquired in building and improving its own system, HLH sees itself becoming an M&E resource base for other organizations. By providing training and a suite of packaged tools, a locally based M&E support facility could have a marked impact on other NGOs operating in the country, enhancing learning and accountability.



Investing in rural people

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International
Labour
Office

Youth Employment Programme – Taqueem Initiative
International Labour Office (ILO)
4, route des Morillons
1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland
tel: +41 22 799 7824
taqueem@ilo.org

www.ilo.org/taqueem