

Rapid Guide to Designing SMART Indicators

[IndiKit](#) is all about indicators that enable us to measure the change our work has achieved. While IndiKit contains hundreds of indicators across different sectors, your project might require you to come up with other indicators. This mini-guide was written to help you in doing so.

In your logframes and M&E systems, you will usually need **three main types of indicators**:

output indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate the <i>immediate benefits</i> of your activities, such as increased knowledge, new skills or delivery of certain services and products 	% of trained farmers who passed the provided test
outcome indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> show the short- and medium-term <i>effects of the project's outputs</i>, such as adoption of a new behaviour or improved access to food 	% of targeted farmers cultivating vitamin A rich orange fleshed sweet potatoes
impact indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> show the <i>long-term effects</i> the project achieved or contributed to, such as reduced prevalence of certain health problems 	% of children aged 24–71 months experiencing night blindness (symptom of vitamin A deficiency)

Each indicator should tell **how a person can recognize that the intended change happened** (i.e. output / outcome / impact was achieved). For example, if an outcome is “Improved access to safe water”, the indicator can be “*% of target households living less than 30 minutes walk from the nearest source of drinking water*”.

While outputs and outcomes can include **directions for progress** (such as “improved ...” or “reduced ...”), these should not be included in any indicators. Some donors also require indicators to be **phrased in a neutral manner**, without including specific targets. The indicators’ baseline and target values are then provided separately (for example: “baseline: 32%, endline: 60%”). When deciding on the target values, consult your M&E Officer or technical advisor on what can realistically be achieved with the resources and strategy you have.

Indicators can measure **qualitative changes** even when they are reported in quantitative terms. For example, the indicator “*% of teachers using at least 4 out of 7 promoted teaching methods*” measures the teaching quality. Similarly, the indicator “*% of women of reproductive age reporting to be satisfied with the quality of services provided by the supported health facilities*” is reported in percentages even though it provides qualitative data. These **qualitative insights are an essential part of our M&E** and should be included in every project design.

When it is difficult to measure the change directly, we often use **proxy indicators** that measure the change indirectly, through another phenomenon. For example, instead of measuring household income (which is a sensitive and hard to measure topic), we measure the monetary value of household consumption. If you use an indicator consisting of several sub-indicators (i.e. a **composite indicator**), ensure that they are all measurable.

When you develop new indicators, **always check whether they are SMART**:

Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From the way the indicator is phrased, is it clear what <i>exactly</i> will be achieved? Avoid using words with an unclear meaning, such as “improved”, “effective” or “capacity” (for example, “<i>% of households who improved their agricultural production</i>”)
Measurable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you sure that it is possible to collect data for such an indicator? (for example, “<i>volume of soil lost due to erosion</i>” is close to impossible to measure) If the data is prone to seasonal changes, can you collect it at the same time of year? Do you have the expertise, time and staff to collect the required data? (for example, measuring the prevalence of undernutrition requires specific expertise + up to 3 weeks of time)
Achievable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it realistic to expect the indicator’s targets to be achieved with the time, HR resources and funding you have? (for example, reduce chronic undernutrition within a two-year project) Overly ambitious targets can make even a great project look like a failure if they are not met.
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the indicator really capture the change you described as your output / outcome / impact?
Time-bound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it clearly specified by when the indicator will be achieved? (e.g. by the end of 2021; this information is often provided for a list of several indicators – not for each individually)

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