**Monitoring and Evaluating Social Development:**

**Making use of the Internet**

**A Concept Paper for Oxfam**

**Version 2.0** **(>December 16th, 1996)**

**Background**

In the final plenary session of the International Workshop on the Evaluation of Social Development[[1]](#footnote-1) Chris Roche (Oxfam UK) raised the possibility of developing Web pages on the Internet[[2]](#footnote-2) specifically devoted to the issues raised during the workshop. My name was put forward as someone who would be willing to help with it’s development and a list was circulated to record names of those who were interested. A total of 28 people put their name on this list, approximately 40% of the listed participants in the workshop. Fifty percent of those interested were from Africa, Asia and Latin America. These represented 72% of the workshop participants from these countries.

In the informal discussions that followed Chris Roche asked me to develop a concept paper, outlining the possibilities of what could be done. This was developed and submitted to Oxfam in late November and discussed briefly with Oxfam staff in December. In the REMAPP meeting on December 16th a brief description was given of the proposal outlined in the concept paper. At that meeting representatives of four other NGOs expressed interest in the proposal (Action Aid, SCF, Plan International, and ITDG). The one overseas participant (from Lesotho) also asked to be kept informed of developments.

This version of the concept paper has been revised to take into account discussions with Oxfam staff and others at the REMAPP meeting.

**A Draft Web Page**

For readers of this concept paper who have online access to the Internet, and a Web browser such as Netscape, please go now to a draft web page that I have set up at *http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/index.htm* This page links to two other pages *news.htm* and *archive.htm* at the same site.These are meant to be prototype pages, not yet in use.

For readers who only have E-mail access to the Internet please try to obtain a copy of the same page(s) by sending the following E-mail:

(To:) *www.kfs.org*

(Re) *URL*

(contents) *http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/index.htm*

Ideally all these pages, starting from index.htm, should be self-explanatory. However, I have made some comments below, mainly on the *index.htm* page (the home page). This is followed by a discussion of some of the implications of developing and maintaining a site and a list of steps that could take the proposal forward into action.

**MandE**

This is the suggested title of the Web page, and appears at the top of the page at *http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/index.htm*. There may be other more eye catching, memorable and relevant names for this site than this. Suggestions are welcome. Changes have already been made. Web pages are eminently changeable.

The second line of text on the page provides a summary explanation of the purpose of the page. At the moment this text says the page is “*A source of information on innovations in monitoring and evaluation methods related to development projects with social development objectives or contents*” This could be changed to be more or less specific.

The next section of this *homepage* points out that the Meta-MandE site has four pages. The first is **Latest News**, which is available on a separate but linked page. The second is an **Archive** of earlier news items, also on a separate page. The third is the remainder of the homepage which outlines in detail the aims and methods of MandE pages as a whole. The fourth, less developed than the others, will list other resources available on the internet which are relevant to monitoring and evaluation. This post-REMAPP development has been stimulated by suggestions from Alex Bush of ITDG. The point of this separation into four pages is to enable people speedy access and use of particular sections (both users and editors).

*MandE News* will have a series of brief news items, up to 150 words each, with the most current at the top, and oldest at the bottom. Each will have a headline capturing the key feature of the news item. The contents of the item will summarise news about an innovation in monitoring or evaluation. The item will detail the source of the news (persons/organisations), locations and dates of any events referred to and how the development differs from what others have done or the same people have done in the past. At the end of each new item readers will be advised how they can get more detailed information - by sending an E-mail to the site developer (already pre-addressed to rick@shimbir...). The reasons for not providing the full text of papers describing the newsworthy events, or their providers E-mail address, are given below.

*MandE Archives* will contain old news items, for example, over three months old or less, if there is a substantial flow of new news items. These would be listed in chronological order, with the oldest at the bottom of the list.

Hidden underneath the text (by use of HTML script) at the beginning of the homepage is a limited series of key words which describe the page[[3]](#footnote-3). Although search engines[[4]](#footnote-4) normally treat all words in a page of text as key words, this list of key words is given special priority by search engines. At the moment they are as follows: "*monitoring, evaluation, indicators, development aid, aid projects, social development, NGOs, PVOs, innovations, participatory impact assessment, participatory evaluation, participatory evaluation, organizational learning*” These should relate to the central purpose of the page and the expected/desired readership. Suggestions about changes or additions are welcome.

**Objectives**

The section titled “*Our Objectives*” goes into more detail than the byline at the top of the homepage. The present set of objectives are intended to make sense as a group. Objectives No. 3 and 4 are in a sense means to the ends described by Objectives No. 1 and 2. All are suggestions only at this stage, there may be other views of the purpose of a Web page that need to be recognised.

**Users**

The section on users should be reasonably self-explanatory.

Many web pages develop an audience or body of users in a haphazard way, simply by advertising their presence far and wide, such as by notifying internet search engines[[5]](#footnote-5) when they are established. Others focus on advertising their existence to specific groups of internet users, such as people participating in specific news groups or mailing lists. Others make use of newspaper and magazine articles and advertisements or television programmes or advertisements. I don’t suggest any of these methods.

The main method of developing a body of users should be by enroling whole organisations that are involved in development aid in one way or another. These could be organisations that have both parallel or complimentary interests (e.g a operational and donor NGOs). The focus should be on the participation of different units or sections of these organisations, again with both parallel and complimentary interests.

This approach will be more efficient in terms of time, money and effort, per user identified. The organisations that do become involved will be in a position to encourage their staff to use MandE, and they may be willing to provide assistance with overhead costs. If they do they will also have an interest in assessing the value their staff, and their programmes, have gained from making use of MandE.

The purpose of having a mailing list of members (belonging in many or most cases to member organisations) is to be able to regularly communicate with users. In a world where there are many demands on people’s attention MandE will have to reach out for people’s attention and not simply sit and wait to be seen and appreciated. One way of doing this is by sending an e-mail to all those on a users mailing list whenever the news page is updated with new material. We want people to continue to access the MandE site, not just to make a once-off visit.

Developing Spanish and French versions of the MandE pages will be important if we want wider readership and use of the material. This is likely to require the purchase of someone’s time to do translation work (See below).

**Accessibility**

The most common means of access to the Internet is E-mail. Many NGOs in Africa and Asia have access to E-mail but do not have access to the World Wide Web. The reason is either that they have taken E-mail access only because it is the cheapest option, or that their local Internet access provider cannot yet provide the continuously online access to the Internet that is needed if people are to search the World Wide Web using a web browser. If the latter is the case then it is likely that at some stage in the future these will have a big enough customer base to afford and thus be able to provide continuous rather than periodic access.

If we are to make best use of the Internet then a hybrid system needs to be designed, one that is accessible by people with full (e.g Web) and partial (e.g E-mail only) access. The proposal that has been made is based on the web page as the core of the system, in expectation that access to the web will increase over time, even in Africa and Asia. E-mail access to the text of these pages is possible and the way in which this can be done needs to be communicated to everyone on the E-mailing list, both when the Meta-MandE pages are set up and periodically afterwards. The method is essentially as described at the beginning of this paper. People send an E-mail to a site known to provide this service (e.g www@kfs.org) with “URL” in the subject line and the name of the web page address in the text of the message. When they receive pages back by E-mail any links to other web pages are detailed as footnotes. Further E-mails can be sent off requesting the pages these links connect to.

**The site developer and supporters**

It is suggested that the site developer (myself at present) should be accountable to a Working Group or body of some other name representing wider interests. Preferably this would be the one or more organisations that want to encourage the development of this means of communication and learning, especially those providing any funding. Even if Oxfam was the sole initiator, the members of the Working Group could be expanded over time. The names and contact addresses of supporters should be advertised on the homepage of the site to provide users with a channel to make any complaints they feel the site developer is not dealing with properly. This information would also give the supporting organisations some public recognition.

The potential role of the site developer is discussed in detail in the second section of this paper.

**Methods**

This section goes into detail on how the system could work.

The reason for the MandE pages not providing full texts on new developments is to make it possible to capture information about the type of demand for the news that has been made available and who the readership is of the news items. Although commercial Internet access providers can provide logs which detail visits to web sites, including which pages have been viewed and at what times, these do not provide information about who visited the site and how they can be contacted in the future. It is proposed that the news items on the MandE News page will offer readers a taste of what they can get from a longer and more detailed account of innovations in the area of monitoring and evaluation of social development. Those accounts would be obtained from the original providers of the news item. The role of the web site developer would be to relay requests for such copies of those documents, from reader to provider. In doing so the web site will accumulate information about demand for specific types of news and more generally a mailing list of people who have visited and used the site.

There may be better means of achieving these ends, which demand less time from a site developer and generate more immediate results for readers. If it is proposed to take the concept paper further then these other possibilities will be explored in detail.

**Performance**

The final section on the home page refers to a number of performance measures.

The first is the numbers of readers, people visiting the site and hopefully reading the pages. This is documented in the form of logs of access by the companies who provide web space. It provides a crude measure of the amount of usage of the site.

The second is a sub-set of the above and represents known readers of the site.

The third is crucial to the success of the site. Without a continuing flow of news there will be little reason for people to visit the site. Low numbers will also signal a failure to recognise and design appropriate incentives. This information will be available to the web site developer.

The fourth is equally important. If there is no demand the web pages are not meeting a need and cannot be justified. There will also be less incentive for people to provide further news item. This information will be available to the web site developer.

Ideally performance on each of these indicators will improve over time, numbers will go up.

Other important measures will include the extent to which there is sustained demand and supply. Individual news items (and their associated more detailed documentation) would ideally continue to be in demand and individual providers of news items will continue to provide new material which is in demand

**Other Considerations**

**1. Site costs**

Demon provide 5 megabytes of space for web pages at the rate of £25 per month plus a £50 set-up fee. This service includes a number of “scripts” (mini-programs) that can be built into web pages, such as counters, automatic dates, reader response forms, and detailed logs of the behaviour of visitors to the pages.

**2. Labour**

In the first section above reference is made simply to a site developer. In practice labour time will be required for four tasks, which could be carried out by one or more people:

1. Site management: Installing the web page, and subsequently editing it’s contents. This requires someone with knowledge of HTML, and ability to use FTP[[6]](#footnote-6) and web browsers. Many large organisations will have someone with these skills these days, even though it may be their pastime rather than an assigned job.

2. News editing: Editing candidate news items and selecting those to go onto the MandE News page. This task does not need to be done by someone with knowledge of web page editing and design. They could simply pass their word processed work to the person doing the site management task, above. On balance however it would probably be better to have both tasks done by the same person, since it would be better if the editor has a feel for the page on which the news would appear. If the roles are kept separate the lead person should be the editor.

3. Mediation: Relaying readers requests for copies of details of news items to news providers, and keeping statistics on such requests. This could be done by someone who only has E-mail access to the Internet. The same person could ensure the MandE E-mailing list is kept up to date, and all those on the E-mailing list are informed when the Meta-MandE New page is updated. Ways of automating all or part of these tasks will be explored.

4. Advertising: for readers and news providers. Both tasks could be shared by the editor and the Working Group members but with the editor taking more responsibility for seeking news providers.

At this stage I am prepared to take on these four roles myself, subject to sufficient interest in the proposal (by more than one NGO) and adequate arrangements for payment of my time.

**3. Initial News Sources**

Ideally the Meta-MandE page should not go online (and be advertised) until there is content on the Meta-MandE News page for readers to view as a first sample. One source of initial items would be the papers presented at the Netherlands workshop. The Working Group and/or editor could contact some of the presenters with requests for short news items based on those papers, with the promise of wider publicity for that work in return. Other initial sources should be tapped as well, so that it is clear to readers on their first visit that the site is simply not a re-hash of the Netherlands workshop. It should provide some genuine news.

**Possible Next Steps**

1. On request, I elaborate specific issues already raised in the current Concept Paper, or others not attended to.

2. I meet with Oxfam staff to discuss the Concept Paper

3. Identification of members for the initial Working Group

4. Identification of person/people to act as site manager, editor, and mediator.

5. Development of trial news items.

6. Development of initial advertising plan.

7. Development of budget and funding sources to cover above, for a trial period.

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[The text of the draft Meta-MandE web homepage is attached]

[Draft Web page contents]

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| **Meta‑MandE** (graphic) |

A source of information on *innovations* in monitoring and evaluation methods

related to development projects with social development objectives or contents.

(under development)

|  |
| --- |
| **Hidden text** <META name="description" content="A site for information exchange on  innovations in monitoring and evaluation methods related to development projects with social development objectives or contents">  <META name="keywords" content="monitoring, evaluation, indicators, development aid, aid projects, NGOs, PVOs, innovations, organisational learning, organizational learning, participatory impact assessment, participatory evaluation, participatory evaluation"> |

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1. For the **latest news** on innovations that has come to our notice, go to **http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/news.htm**

2. For **archives** of old news, go to **http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/archives.htm**

3. For details on  **users** and **supporters**, our **objectives** and our **methods,** look further down this page.

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Users and Supporters include

(a) People with direct access to the World Wide Web using web browsers such as Netscape.

(b) People with e‑mail access to the Internet only. Instructions on how people can use e‑mail messages to get access to the contents of the Meta‑MandE pages are given at the bottom of this page. Please pass this information on to such people.

Within both groups there will be some people whose names are on our e‑mailing list. We will automatically notify these people when the Meta‑MandE News page is updated. If you want to be on this mailing please tell us. We are specially interested in including people resident in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America.

We also hope we will be able to provide Spanish and French versions of these pages.

This site is being developed by Rick Davies, from the Centre for Development Studies in Swansea. He can be contacted by e‑mail at rick@shimbir.demon.co.uk or by phone/fax on 44 (0)1223 841367.

He is accountable to, and supported by, the **MME Working** Group. The members of this group are: Oxfam UK (Chris Roche, croche@oxfam.org.uk).....

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Our Objectives are to:

1. **Increase the speed** with which news about innovations in methods of monitoring and evaluation is disseminated amongst NGOs (PVOs), as well as bilateral and multilateral development organisations. Our special interest is in applications that can be used in projects with significant social development objectives or contents.

2. **Widen the geographic scale** on which news about innovations is made available.

3. **Provide incentives** for people to document innovations they know of, or have developed, by giving their work wider and quicker recognition.

4. **To increase the rate of innovation** in monitoring and evaluation methods.

And through all these steps, to improve the value of monitoring and evaluation activities, especially the value poor people get from development aid.

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Our Methods:

(This section is directed mainly to potential providers of news about innovations)

1. We are looking for news items: brief accounts of new ways of doing things that fall under the category of monitoring or evaluation and which relate to social development. We take a wide and generous view of what these terms mean. We are interested in very small scale innovations and improvements, as well as big developments.

2. You can send these news items to us either by e‑mail (rick@shimbir.demon.co.uk), by fax (00 44 (0)1223 841367) or by post (to Rick Davies, Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea, Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP, Wales, UK,).

3. We will display these news items on the Meta‑MandE News page in their original form, as much as it is possible. However, we reserve the right to act as newspaper editors, selecting stories which are the most newsworthy and giving priority (of location and size) to those that we think are most newsworthy.

4. We will move these to the Archives page after three months, or sooner, if there is a rapid flow of news. In the Archive they will be listed with those items most in demand (see below) at the top, and those less in demand toward the bottom.

5. When we present news items we will give some basic information about you, the writer. When readers want more information about the news item they will e‑mail us and we will forward that e‑mail on to you. This way we will get some indication of the relative amount of demand for information about different innovations, and you will know who your readers are. We may change this way of doing things later, depending on how it works.

6. We want to encourage you to develop a more detailed report on the innovations you have told us about, in addition to the news item. Ideally these could be sent by you direct to the people who have contacted you (via us) asking for more details about your news.

7. We hope we will be able to develop some means of compensating people for the costs they incur when physically mailing documents that are in demand (especially people in lower income countries). We would particularly like to do this where there is repeated demand for more information about specific news items.

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Our Performance ?

We hope to be able to provide some time series statistics about the performance of Meta‑MandE.

These will include:

1. The number of times the Meta‑MandE home page has been accessed. So far: [counter]

2. The number of people on the Meta‑MandE mailing list.

3. The number of news items sent to us.

4. The level of demand for further information on specific news items.

We will also provide information on the geographic distribution of people using Meta-MandE.

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E‑mail access to Meta‑MandE

If you know of people who only have e‑mail access to the Internet but who may want to access the Meta‑MandE pages, tell them to send an E-mail message as follows:

To: *www@kfs.org*

From: (their E-mail address)

Re: *URL*

In the contents section simply place the address of this site, or the address of any other web page they want a copy of e.g *http://www.shimbir.demon.co.uk/index.htm*

After sending this e‑mail message they will receive an e‑mail copy of the web page. At the bottom of this e‑mail will be a list of other web sites referred to in the text of the web page. A copy of any of those web pages can be obtained by the same means as outlined above.

Please note that this address is not involved in the development or maintenance of the Meta‑MandE pages. Inquiries or concerns of any sort should not be addressed to them, but to Rick Davies at *rick@shimbir.demon.co.uk*

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For those interested in more detail about accessing information on the Internet via E-mail the following document is available:

*Accessing the Internet by E-mail: Doctor Bob’s Guide to Offline Internet Access. 5th Edition - January 1996.*

Copies can be obtained by sending the following E-mail:

To: *mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk*

From:

Subject: (leave empty)

Message: *send lis-iis e-access-inet.txt*

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1. Leeuwenhorst, Netherlands, 4-8 November 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Internet is a global network of computers. Various types of services are offered on this network. These include E-mail, file transfer (FTP), remote operation of computers (Telnet) and the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web is a global network of documents (called pages), inter-connected by cross references within each text which when activated by mouse clicks bring the linked document up on the screen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. By using a HTML “Meta” tag [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A device people browsing the web use to find web pages on subjects they are interested in. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Such as Alta Vista. They offer key word searches for web sites covering any possible subject. They work by regularly searching all known sites and indexing everything in sight. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Standing for File Transfer Protocol (I think), meaning transfer of files between computers. Necessary to upload web pages onto a file server where people browsing the web can get access to the web page. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)