

"That's a valuable lesson I will never forget" – is a statement that everyone has either said or thought. Identifying lessons learned through our M&E efforts helps us to uncover programming practices or operational approaches that we want to promote, avoid, or share with others. One can simply think of a lesson learnt in this way, **“What would we do differently next time? And what would we do the same?”** These lessons learnt can be very large or small in scope, for example:

- “We learned that inviting more than 15 participants to be part of the committee resulted in ineffective meetings.”
- “The Project learned that referral letters for beneficiaries help them access better care at hospitals/clinics.”
- “The Project learned that the selection of volunteers should rest with the community, but the project should provide clear selection criteria, as well as defined expectations for volunteers.”
- “We learned that food has a visible, observable effect on the overall health and nutritional status of HIV positive people.”
- “We learned that education assistance, when coupled with psychosocial support, was very effective in improving the overall quality of education support for the children.”

KEY TIPS FOR FORMULATING LESSONS LEARNT

- Lessons learnt should consist of a generalised principle that can be applied in other situations.
- Do not write the lesson only as an observation, description or a recommendation that lacks justification. Justify the lesson with proof of why it is valid.
- Explain the lesson in the context of the project. For it to be useful to others, they need to understand the situation in which it occurred to know if might be appropriate or useful for them.

Lessons learnt are usually acquired through personal or collective experiences and can cover a wide range of topics. Most importantly, they capture a shift in our understanding about an activity or process and provide new learning for ongoing or future programming. When lessons learnt are identified, documented and disseminated, this, in and of itself, is a project success.

What is a best practice?

A best practice is essentially “what works best in a particular context.” It is a sound planning or operational practice or set of actions that is used to demonstrate and analyse what works (or what does not work) and why. Best practices are innovative; they make a difference; they have a sustainable effect; and they serve as a model for replicating and adapting initiatives elsewhere. A commitment to learning about, using, and analysing the best practices in any field is a commitment to accumulating and applying all the knowledge at one's disposal to ensure quantitative and qualitative results.

Identifying lessons learnt & best practices

If three or more of the following questions can be answered affirmatively, you probably will have more to say about the best practice or lesson learnt from a project:

YES NO

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| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a clear chain of cause and effect that can be seen between activities and results? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Has there been a quantitatively measurable change in the situation for participants over time? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Was the coverage complete? Was the target population reached wholly by the activity? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Were resources used in a timely, efficient and effective manner? (Consider all different kinds of resources used: human, material, financial.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the results of the activity permanent? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the project, activity or practice flexible enough to maintain its effectiveness in response to the changing needs of participants or in a changing environment? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the practice appropriately tuned to local and national priorities for development programming? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a feeling of local ownership? Can the activity become independent of its original funding sources, or from outside funding? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Does this practice contribute to long-range development goals? Does it improve support to vulnerable people? |