

**GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING
THE IMPACT OF
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
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DRAFT

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Why should councils measure the impact of international cooperation?	3
Methodology for measuring the impact of international work.....	5
DEFINITION	6
RATIONALE.....	8
SCOPE.....	9
KEY ACTORS	12
DATA COLLECTION	12
ANALYSIS	13
REPORTING.....	14
REVIEW – knowledge management	14
CONCLUSION	15
Case studies and resources.....	15

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

This guidance note has been produced for councils, and with the assistance of councils, to explore the subject of measuring the impact of international work carried out by local authorities. The note is aimed at a wide audience of local authorities; including unitary, county and district councils and, therefore, much of the information is generic. It also recognises that, while sharing characteristics, service demands and challenges, each council is unique. Each council has its own corporate priorities and objectives and therefore the type and degree of international engagement will vary. Thus the level of monitoring required will also need to be flexible accordingly.

The aim of this guide is to introduce the topic of measuring international work and to stimulate discussion and provide some suggested resources and links. Councils should use the notes as a starting point to consider how to review and assess future and existing international activities.

Why should councils measure the impact of international cooperation?

There are three clear reasons for capturing and analysing the impact of international activities:

1. Internal review

To monitor the progress of a project, ensuring it is meeting agreed goals and objectives. It is also valuable to capture additional issues / outcomes that may have occurred when implementing a project which can be learnt from and improved upon.

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2. Reporting to council members / funders

It helps to identify the contribution of these activities to core aspects of a council's work and provide clear evidence of the impacts of the project to those groups that have politically endorsed and agreed to fund the work.

3. Communicating to the public and media

By establishing a robust evidence base, a council will be better placed to clearly present the outcomes and value of international cooperation to their local citizens and media.

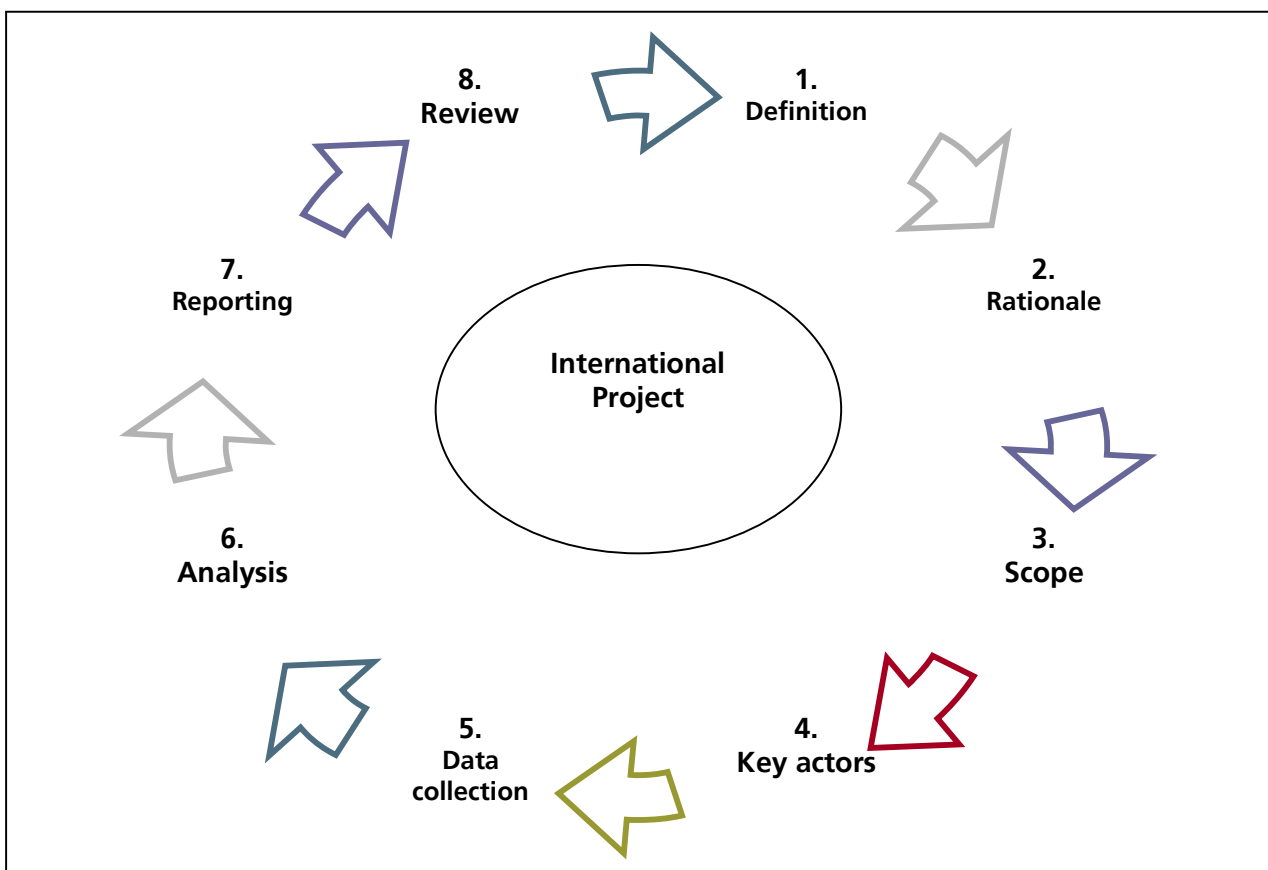
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METHODOLOGY FOR MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL WORK

The methodology or approach to use when measuring the impact of international activities will depend on the types of activities the council is involved in. It is important to set up a fairly simple and clear system for measurement to allow ongoing assessment over-time but without over-burdening a project.

The methodology should seek to include the following steps (see Figure 1 below):

Figure 1. Broad steps for reviewing your project



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DEFINITION

What are the principle goals, key objectives and desired outputs for the international activity?

Objectives - For the first step in project development and monitoring of that project, it is vital to clarify the principal goal and objectives i.e. purpose of the work; firstly, to ensure that all partners are working from the same song-sheet with jointly agreed priorities and responsibilities; secondly, to have a clear basis from which to assess on-going progress and results.

Framing - A typical 'log-frame' table is often used at this stage of defining / planning a project. The framework requires those involved to break down the proposal into desired goals, objectives, activities and outputs. It then requires agreed definition of how these elements will be monitored and assessed. For example, when designing any international project it is important to be clear about the type of project / activity that is being assessed. International work can range from ad-hoc partnerships, formal twinning and friendship agreements, schools exchanges, trade missions, one-off and short-term technical projects. . Table 1. below is an example of the types of factors that could be included in a project plan.

Resources – the cost (human and financial) implications of monitoring should ideally be factored in to a project plan and budget when it is being developed, as should the time required to collect, analyze, review and report the information obtained.

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Table 1. elements to include in a strategic plan

Project summary	Measurable indicators	Means of verification	Important assumptions
GOAL: Improvement in the lives and living conditions of poor households and communities in Malawi	- Communities have increased access to sustainable basic services	- Programme evaluation - Observation analysis - Comparisons against national country plans	- Social and economic stability - Community residents see value in the project - Central government is receptive to the project goals
PURPOSE: Households and community groups see a reduction in unmet needs through improved delivery of appropriate basic services	- Improvement in the quantity and quality of basic services, falling under the responsibility of local government including: primary education, social welfare, public health, broader environmental health and housing compared to pre-programme levels	- Programme evaluation - Meeting minutes and reports - Discussion with other civil society groups - Local level assessment reports - Discussion with other local and central government representatives - Visit reports - Group discussions with community groups	- Stability of staffing in the council
OUTPUTS: (1) The local council is functioning effectively as a sustainable and relevant instrument of local government (2) The local council has developed a clear system for community engagement and is demonstrating this	(1) - The council has established plans in place - The council is working towards the delivery of strategic plans and is able to monitor performance against these plans - A reduction in unmet needs at the community level (2) - Community groups have full access to council officials who have mechanisms for consulting and responding to their input	(1) - Written plans - Records of progress against plans with improving trends (2) - Interviews with community groups. - Minutes of meetings and activity records	

Source: LGA (2006) Take your partners.

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

RATIONALE

Why do we need to measure the impacts? Who are we measuring it for?

If the project is receiving external funding or grant an assessment, as well as audit, is likely to be required to demonstrate achievement of agreed objectives to the funder. Whilst it may seem like an additional burden to the work, measuring and recording the outcomes of international working is vital to:

- identify the contribution these activities are making to core aspects of council work;
- promote accountability and political support;
- provide information to communicate the work clearly to the public and media;
- inform and enhance the on-going management and implementation of the project, as well as future activities.

In order to frame the assessment and how it is communicated it is important to be clear **who** 'needs' to know the results of such as assessment. As outlined above this will include:

- internal actors: local councillors, senior managers and chief executive, key officers;
- external actors: key representatives from community groups, the media, private sector, funders.

Monitoring international work is trying to capture whether a project is actually achieving its desired aims or purpose. A part of this will obviously be to capture the impacts (positive and negative) to:

- Council: management, service delivery, policy and administrative impacts
- Community: service reception, engagement, demographic impacts

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Wider outcomes: looking beyond local authority area e.g. regional development, national policy and legislative changes

SCOPE

What and how are we going to measure the work?

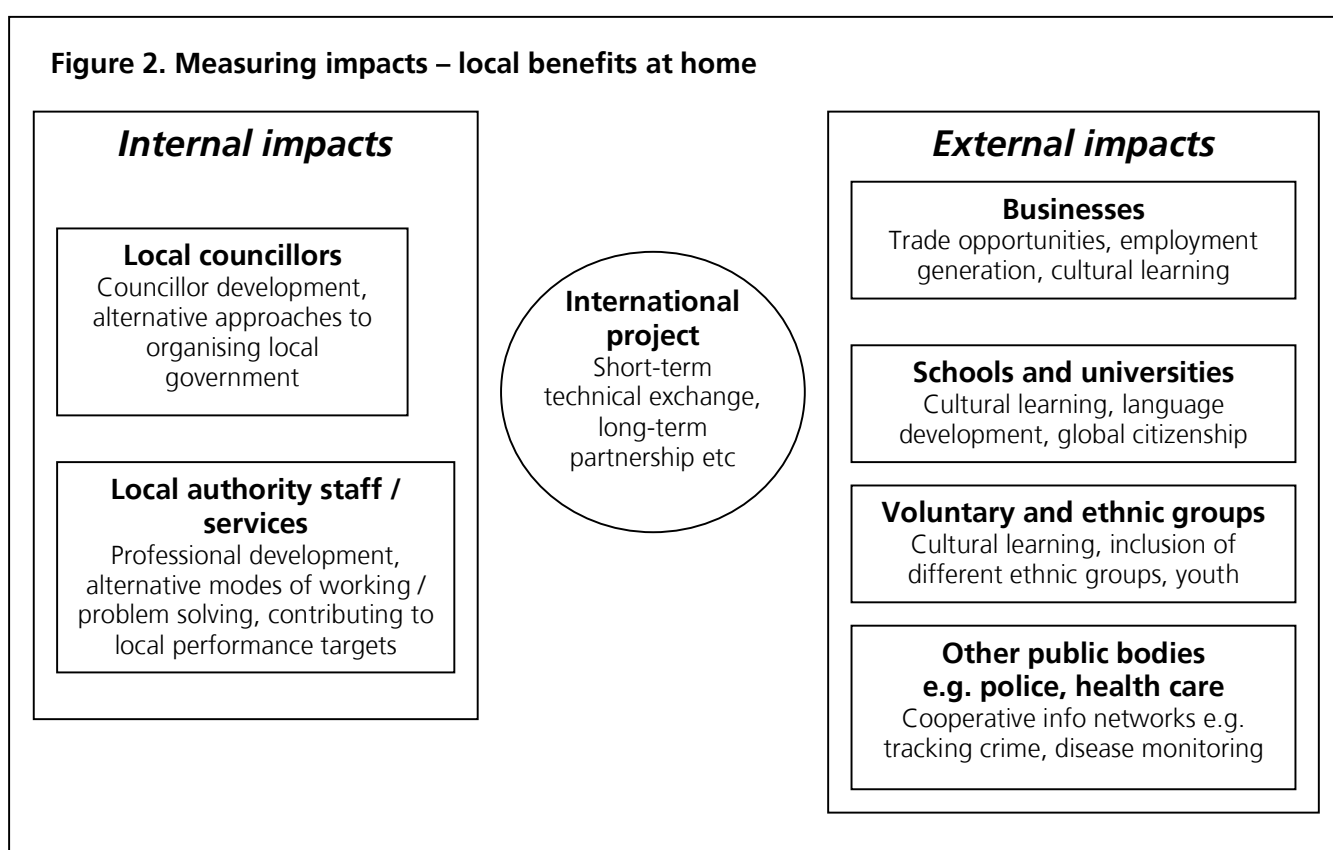
Any assessment needs to be realistic in terms of the **resources** (financial and human) that are available. The council will also need to decide **how frequently** it will carry out assessments and data collection (e.g. annual assessments and quarterly data collection). The methodology needs to define what are the **key factors** that it is seeking to capture to ensure a focused and reasonably straight forward assessment. No review will be able to capture all the impacts involved. An assessment should also seek to address both the domestic and partner / overseas impacts of the project. These might include:

Domestic factors

- Internal council impacts - Measuring and recording the outcomes of international working in relation to its impacts to staff and their work within an authority, and to councillors and their council activities.
- External impacts – Such work can impact upon different aspects of a *local community*, including raising cultural awareness (through educational activities and information provision), economic development (through building business links and employment opportunities), promoting community cohesion (through community events, joint trips), etc. A project will also affect *different stakeholders* in a community in different ways and the scoping exercise needs to draw out the principle groups who may need to be consulted and represented in an assessment.

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Figure 2 summarises some examples of impacts and key stakeholders based on research by School of Public Policy at University Birmingham¹. International work can have both positive and negative impacts. Negative impacts might include bad press that results from questioning about the relevance and validity of such work to the local tax payer. It is important to consider and address both as part of the on-going work of a project.



International factors

It is also important to consider the international impacts to the partner authority / community. Such impacts could include many of those mentioned above in the domestic factors. But the emphasis may be different depending on the local priorities of the partner and those priorities of the funders who may be supporting the project. For example, with development links –

¹ UK Local Government Alliance for International Development (2005) *What are the benefits of international development activities? Summary report of research by the School of Public Policy, Birmingham University*

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

working in developing countries - there will be a strong emphasis on providing evidence of the impacts to poorer and marginalised communities (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Fighting global poverty

Decentralised cooperation with municipal partners in the developing world deserves special attention here. In 2000 at the Millennium Summit government donors and aid agencies agreed to a set of Millennium Development Goals – with targets to monitor progress towards reducing poverty at global, national and local levels. The Goals are:

The Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

The United Nations has produced a set of indicators for monitoring progress on these goals at a national level. However many of these are also appropriate for local assessment. These are referred to in Annex 1 and are available online at: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx>

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

KEY ACTORS

Who will undertake the assessment and how will stakeholders be involved?

For domestic impacts you may decide to undertake the assessment internally by the local authority or to bring in an independent assessor. If it is carried out internally it may still need to show some independent verification / validation e.g. post-assessment community survey to monitor whether the outcomes are perceived to be accurate by the wider community.

For international impacts it may be agreed that your partner authority will carry out the assessment themselves, in collaboration with your council, and report the outcomes to you. Your council might undertake the task on their behalf, with their support. Or again you may opt for an independent assessor. The process of monitoring would need to be agreed early in the collaboration.

Stakeholder engagement – community groups and others should be involved in monitoring from the outset. A scoping exercise to identify key groups and networks will be a necessary step here, to ensure that no key party is excluded. Some resources will need to be set aside to allow for stakeholder scoping, consultation and involvement.

DATA COLLECTION

What indicators will help us to measure these impacts? And how can we collect / measure these indicators?

Indicators need to be 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Relevant and Time-bound). They need include those key indicators that will show how the work can contribute to the identified goals for the project, to improving a council's service delivery and performance in

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

critical areas. Some factors will be more qualitative in nature. Therefore some indicators may be semi-quantified where it is not possible to have more quantitative indicators.

Domestic indicators: Some local authorities, such as Southwark and Wolverhampton, have developed their own Key Performance Indicators for international working. Annex 1. highlights some examples of indicators that could be used – depending on the projects objectives and key areas that are being assessed.

International indicators – partner community assessment: Various studies have identified critical poverty and community-based indicators which are referred to in Annex 1. However, less poverty-orientated objectives may also be agreed as key for a project and therefore important to consider.

Data can be collected by a variety of means including:

- Primary research – There are a range of tools available to collect quantitative and qualitative information, including census techniques using face-to-face and telephone surveys, online and mail-out questionnaires, or pooling more anecdotal evidence from community workshops, interviews and discussions at public meetings.
- Secondary research - Desk-based data collection using existing reports, surveys and monitoring activities that may already capture useful data can contribute to revealing the impacts of a project. This is clearly preferable in terms of cost and time, where data exists, but for many ongoing projects it will be necessary to capture up-to-date primary data in order to clarify the direct impact of a particular project.

ANALYSIS

Synthesis main findings

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Once the data has been collected it is then necessary to pull-out the principle trends from the data and thus identify key impacts of the work. The analysis should enable the production of policy and project recommendations arising from the project and / or future activities.

Data mapping / presentation

It can be beneficial to map out the main impacts geographically or using diagrams to find a pictorial way of communicating how particular groups / local neighbourhoods have been affected by the work.

REPORTING

Communication

The results assessment should be disseminated in a variety of means and media, including formal council reports, press briefings, community publications and events, council website, community notice boards.

Validation

Any reports should allow for community / stakeholder feedback and comment to enable verification / validation of the findings of the assessment.

REVIEW – knowledge management

Finally, the results of the assessment, along with any feedback from reports, should be used to revise the project, where necessary, and make key recommendations to the council and staff as well as project partner/s in the continued implementation of a project or for further follow-up.

GUIDANCE NOTE - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CONCLUSION

This is a guide and not a precise rulebook of how to undertake monitoring of international activities. It is a complex area and there no one-size-fits-all answer to monitoring.

The guide is available on the LGA website on a page that includes links to some specific case studies from local councils who are adopting this approach to their international activities.

Case studies and Resources

UN Millennium Development Goals – national reporting indicators

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx>

IDRC (2009) Fighting Poverty With Facts – Community Based Monitoring Systems.

International for Development Research Centre. www.idrc.ca