Practical guide

KOMPASS

Results-based monitoring (RBM) is an integral part of the commissioning procedure and is a minimum standard for ensuring the quality of GIZ projects and programmes. The intended change process that is to be brought about, as represented in the results model, is the basis and substantive point of reference for the RBM system. The open and systematic documentation of different perspectives using the KOMPASS (Open recording of comparative perspectives of partners and target groups) procedure and a system of qualitative analysis makes it possible to include the perspectives of key stakeholders in the RBM system. This procedure supplements the ongoing measurement of project progress by means of indicators.

Objectives

In accordance with GIZ's internal O+R system (Orientation and Rules), the KOMPASS procedure should be carried out at least once during the term of each measure that is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) with a commission value exceeding EUR 1 million. However, it is recommended that the KOMPASS procedure be applied to all GIZ projects and programmes. Despite this binding requirement, stakeholders in many GIZ projects and programmes are not being systematically interviewed, as shown by the large number of project evaluation reports that criticise the lack of corresponding KOMPASS data in the monitoring systems of the evaluated projects. The frequent enquiries made to the Methodological Approaches Division of the Sectoral Department are evidence of the fact that, in most of these cases, people are not familiar with the purpose of recording comparative perspectives and the benefit that can be derived from this. Many requests have been made for practical guidelines on the methodological implementation of the KOMPASS procedure.

To provide guidance and support for officers responsible for the commission, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers and consultants/advisors, this practical guide gives examples of the successful application of the KOMPASS procedure.

It illustrates how the methodological approach was further developed by a consultant as part of an advisory assignment and with due regard for GIZ's specifications.

Before the practical guidance on methodological implementation is described, the purpose and benefits of the KOMPASS procedure will first be outlined.

KOMPASS as an integral part of results monitoring

The quality criteria of RBM systems include the monitoring of results indicators, the examination of results hypotheses and the observation of risks, assumptions and unintended results. The participatory KOMPASS procedure is required in order to systematically incorporate the views and experiences of key stakeholders into the monitoring system. Since the procedure records many different perspectives, KOMPASS helps to avoid the risk of developing 'organizational blindness. Key stakeholders can openly express their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the project or programme and therefore put their own stamp on the process.

Within its KOMPASS procedure, GIZ has grouped together a number of qualitative methods and provides corresponding tools that are intended to facilitate the selection of methods, e.g. focus groups and semi-structured interviews (see Link in DMS). Other qualitative methods or tools may be used in addition. What is important is that they enable the participants to follow an open-ended approach.

The purpose and benefits of KOMPASS are shown by the answers to these **frequently asked questions:**

Why is indicator-based monitoring not sufficient on its own?

By focusing uniquely on indicators, it is possible to overlook other dimensions of results that are difficult to quantify, e.g. results that can only be substantiated with figures at considerable expense and with a great deal of effort. This means it is often the quantity rather than the quality of a change process that is recorded. For example, the project budget does not always make it possible to carry out representative surveys to measure the satisfaction of target groups. The numerical values measured by indicators only prove whether intended changes have occurred. They do not inform us why a change occurred, or why it did not. So, on their own, the measured values do not prove to what extent the change can actually be attributed to project activities and whether the hypotheses in the results model are accurate. Added to this, in many monitoring systems, the indicators only operationalise intended results, i.e. a positive change process. Indicator-based monitoring therefore fails to record the unintended results generated by the project or programme.

To put it briefly, indicators and KOMPASS complement each other.

Why is it so important to include external actors in the monitoring process?

The results model developed during the planning phase is not carved in stone until the end of the project term. The results logic it represents has to be reviewed and possibly adjusted at regular intervals. The corresponding adjustments are reflected in the RBM system. Key stakeholders are an indispensable source of information that allows taking a fresh look at the results logic. They are perfectly familiar with the context in which the measure is being implemented and can for example provide valuable information on the observed risks and unintended results.

When is the best time to carry out the KOMPASS procedure?

Depending on requirements and the information to be obtained, the open-ended recording of perspectives may make sense at different stages of the project. If the project prefers to carry out only one comprehensive KOMPASS survey during the term, it is advisable to schedule it not too soon after the project commences and not too close to the end of the project term. It is recommend compiling data for the KOMPASS procedure roughly in mid-term. By then, key stakeholders are familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the project or programme and are able to detect any 'blind spots'. As an alternative or supplement, KOMPASS surveys can be repeated on a more limited basis at different times during the project term.

How does KOMPASS differ from the project evaluation, given that both procedures involve interviews with key stakeholders?

KOMPASS provides information obtained by means of qualitative methods and an open-ended, flexible approach. This information is fed into the results-based monitoring system. As with all other monitoring data, the KOMPASS findings are also meant to be used by the officer responsible for the commission together with the project team and partners to make managerial and strategic decisions during the term of the project. These data make it possible to detect 'blind spots' or unintended (positive and negative) results and to take corrective measures. The project evaluation, on the other hand, is conducted at the end of the project term and retrospectively assesses the development effectiveness of the project in line with the OECD/DAC criteria and the Capacity WORKS success factors. In so doing, it uses the KOMPASS findings as an important data source in addition to other monitoring data.

Practical guide to using KOMPASS in the field

The following recommendations for possible ways to proceed are intended for your guidance and are based on specific advisory experience (see links to examples from the field).

Preparation

Preparation should start six to eight weeks before the KOMPASS procedure is applied. During a scheduled meeting, the officer responsible for the commission should inform project staff (and, where possible and it makes sense, the project partners) about the methodological approach behind KOMPASS and make them aware of the procedure's usefulness for the project. Together with the project's M&E officer, the officers in charge of the different fields of activity can then assume responsibility for specific preparation.

Selection of interview partners

The interview partners should then be systematically selected, bearing in mind the following criteria:

- Representativeness of the lead executing agency and other implementing partners (contact persons involved in strategic implementation, alignment with the principle of seniority, where applicable spanning different levels of government);
- Knowledge of the fields of activity and the various work packages (contact persons involved in operational implementation); and
- Experience as a final beneficiary of the positive changes to be brought about by the project.

Additional stakeholders can be interviewed who are not members of the project's target groups but may be able to contribute qualified viewpoints, for example as experts in the given sector.

Since projects are usually implemented in various regions and administrative districts of a partner country, interview partners should also be systematically selected from these, giving reasons for their selection.

Choice of methodological approach

The next step is to decide whether individual interviews or group discussions are most suitable for recording the different perspectives. Focus group discussions are recommended for interviewing final beneficiaries. Semi-structured interviews are more suitable, though, for interviewing contact persons involved in strategic and operational implementation.

Questionnaires and structured key questions should then be devised. The research question depends on the information to be obtained by the KOMPASS procedure. As an integral part of results-based monitoring, this is meant to examine the intended change process presented in the results model:

How do key stakeholders assess the intended and unintended results of the project/programme, and which external factors impede or foster these results, in their opinion?

The following **analytical questions** map the key aspects of a KOMPASS survey or define it in greater detail:

- What are the key intended changes that result from the project activities? (Possible additional questions: What key changes did you expect but that did not occur? What key changes do you hope to see by the end of the project term?)
- What key external factors (risks) impede the achievement of objectives? What key external factors (assumptions) have a conducive effect?
- Do you know of any positive or negative unintended (unplanned) results?
- To what extent do synergies exist with the interventions of other donors in the sector? Are there any overlaps?

The analytical questions should be neutrally, clearly and simply worded. The questions should be open-ended and allow interview partners to set their own priorities.

Preliminary test

Before carrying out KOMPASS, it is advisable to perform a preliminary test with the staff of the project or programme, as they are usually well equipped to assess the interview situations to be expected with the interviewees. For instance, the GIZ project team should be able to assess the extent to which key stakeholders are familiar with M&E terminology. Depending on the interview situation, technical terms should either be translated into everyday language or clearly defined. The preliminary test also makes it possible to establish whether all of the analytical questions are suitable for all interview situations. It might be difficult for final beneficiaries to make statements on other donor interventions in the sector, for example.

Implementation

Depending on the size and complexity of the project/programme, it is recommended to schedule one to two weeks for carrying out KOMPASS. The number of interview partners will vary, depending on how many people are interviewed in individual talks or group discussions. As a rule of thumb, the total number of people interviewed during a KOMPASS survey is between 15 and 25.

About one hour should be scheduled for the individual interviews, and between one and a half and two hours for the group discussions. Depending on the interview situation, a recording device or a notepad can be used to take notes. If desired and appropriate, photographs are a good way to enrich KOMPASS reports.

As a rule, progress towards implementation will vary widely between the different fields of activity. This means the focus of the first analytical question, which refers to key changes, may vary too (focusing more on the past or the future).

It also has to be decided whether or not to share the results model diagram with interviewees during the interview. Complex models that show a maze of results fields and hypotheses call for an introduction to the relevant methodology; however, this is often not possible given the time allowed for an interview. Since the interview findings concern the project's results logic, they can also be used after the KOMPASS survey to adjust the results model.

Follow-up

When analysing the qualitative data, the records of the interviews should be assessed according to categories based on the interview questions: 1. key intended changes resulting from the project activities; 2. external factors (risks, assumptions); 3. unintended results; and 4. other donor interventions in the sector.

Each statement should be analysed, sorted according to its relevance and assigned to the corresponding category. The statements are either summarised thematically or given as direct quotes. The findings can only be compared if they refer to the same fields of activity and packages of activities.

The findings should be reflected on in the project's monitoring meetings, used to adjust the results model and fed into the project's RBM system. The web-based Results monitor contains special fields in which KOMPASS findings can be entered.

The officer responsible for the commission should use the KOMPASS findings together with the project team and partners to make management and strategic decisions, and incorporate these into reports to the commissioning party. The team that carries out the project evaluation at the end of the project term can then be provided with a wealth of valuable information.