

Session 6.

Principles of Environmental Monitoring

Technical presentation and dialogue

Summary

Definition—Environmental monitoring is both:

- A. Systematic observation of key environmental conditions.
- B. Systematic verification of the implementation of mitigation measures.

Environmental monitoring is a necessary complement to mitigation. Its purpose is to tell us clearly and cost-effectively if mitigation is sufficient and effective. Throughout this session, we will see that environmental monitoring must be highly targeted.

A. **Observing environmental conditions.** The environmental conditions observed are those:

- That correspond to impacts and mitigation measures. For example, a key potential impact of an irrigation project is groundwater contamination. Therefore, **ground-water quality** is monitored.
- Upon which the project depends for its success. For example, a water supply project depends on clean source water. Therefore, **source water quality** is monitored.

We observe and measure environmental conditions by using **environmental indicators**, which are signals of or proxies for the stock and quality of key environmental resources, or of environmental health and ecosystem function.

Indicators can require complex equipment to measure (e.g., testing water for pesticide residues), but they can also be very simple—and often for small-scale activities simple indicators are best. (For example, groundwater levels can be measured in a shallow well using a rope and bucket.)

A key principle of monitoring is choosing the simplest indicator that meets your needs.

To distinguish the impacts of your activity from other factors, thought needs to go into the times and places that indicators are measured.

For example, consider an agricultural processing facility that draws water from a stream. The facility has potential to adversely impact surface water quality. A good monitoring approach would:

- Take water samples from the stream at the intake point and downstream from the seepage pits.
- Take samples from these different locations at the same time.
- Take samples during both high and low flow periods during the processing season.

B. **Verifying Implementation of Mitigation Measures.** We can verify (and quantify!) implementation of mitigation measures in two ways: via paper reports and via field inspection. In each case, we use **mitigation implementation indicators**. For example, monitoring of medical waste management in a clinics activity could ask the beneficiary clinics to attach their waste management plan. A field inspection would spot-check that key elements of the plan were being implemented.

Good environmental monitoring is targeted and takes the simplest effective approach. It usually requires a combination of environmental conditions indicators and mitigation implementation indicators.

Objective

Establish the objective of environmental monitoring (determining clearly and cost-effectively if mitigation is sufficient and effective); brief the two types of environmental monitoring indicators and achieve a common understanding of the principles of environmental monitoring design.

Key resource

- The *Environmental Guidelines for Small-Scale Activities* is a key resource for design of mitigation and monitoring measures.