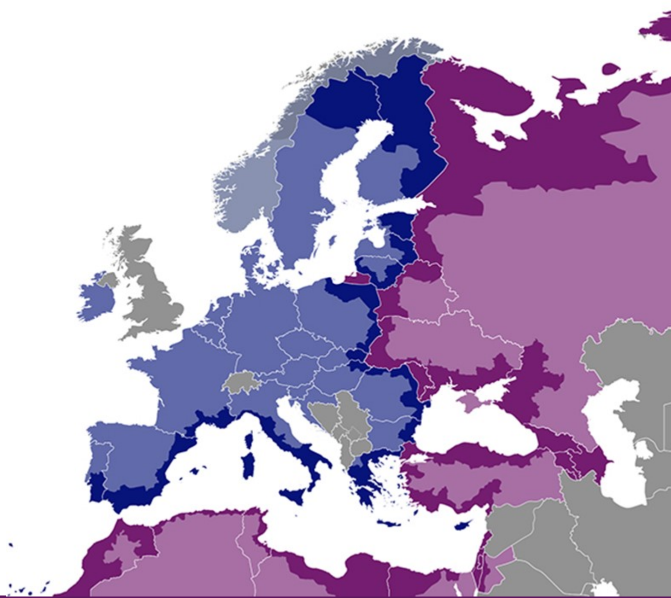
TESIM
Technical support to the implementation and management of ENI CBC programmes

ENI CBC on-line event on monitoring and evaluation

- ***Practical aspects of the result-oriented monitoring of projects***

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
(May 2020)



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Introduction

This document provides answers to the questions raised by the participants during and after the **on-line events on the practical aspects of the result-oriented monitoring (ROM) of projects** that took place on 31 March and 7 April. Its aim is to provide answers to 1) standard questions related to ROM, 2) questions raised by the Managing Authorities (MAs) and Joint Technical Secretariats (JTSs) during these events.

Please note that the provided information is based on the TESIM factsheet on result-oriented monitoring and the materials from the two on-line events, as well as the experience in carrying out ROM missions by the European Commission (EC). It does not represent an opinion of the EC itself.

General aspects and legal framework

1. Where does the obligation to carry out ROM come from?

The ENI CBC Implementing Rules state in Article 78.3 that "*the Managing Authority shall carry out result-oriented programme and project monitoring in addition to the day-to-day monitoring*".

2. Do ENI CBC programmes need to apply ROM as in the "standard" ROM methodology?

No, this is not a compulsory requirement. The ROM handbook provides templates and instructions for the ROM missions that are carried out on request of the EC.

For the purposes of the ROM by the MA, this **methodology can be adapted** to the needs of the programmes, including the monitoring of the cross-border aspects inherent to ENI CBC. However, the basic characteristics of the ROM need to be kept, namely:

- Distinction from the day-to-day monitoring;
- Focus on results;
- Provision of recommendations to improve project performance.

3. What is the difference between ROM and evaluation?

Even if both, evaluation and ROM, use the same criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability), they approach them from a different perspective. **Evaluation** gives evidence of *why* intended changes are or are not being achieved, and it also seeks to address issues of causality. **The ROM** is aimed instead to review the performance of an on-going project/programme, with focus on its results, and to suggest appropriate actions for improvement.

Evaluation uses a large range of methods and tools, in some cases in-depth research, sophisticated statistical models and econometric tools, whereas ROM is a quick exercise limited to desk research and interviews. For this reason, ROM is more useful than an evaluation to provide just in time recommendations for ongoing improvements of the programmes and projects.

4. What is the role of ROM among the project monitoring activities?

In their day-to-day monitoring activities, the staff of the MA and JTS **review project progress** through the analysis of the submitted reports, have regular contacts with the lead beneficiary by e-mail and telephone and, whenever possible, attend important project events. At the same time, ROM can provide insights on the **quality of project implementation** and **contribute to improving the capacity of project beneficiaries** to manage the project by using the logical framework as management tool, thus increasing the likelihood of **achievement of the project objectives**.

ROM assesses the implementation processes and the project activities and produced outputs from the perspective of the likelihood of achieving the project objectives and the expected results. ROM cannot go into the implementation details as does the monitoring, but it allows to identify the key implementation issues and recommendations to improve the performance.

5. What is ROM good for? What criteria in the risk assessment could lead to the selection of a project for ROM?

ROM can best help to solve issues in projects that have **implementation problems or high operational risks,** also highly **complex or innovative** projects. It will help the project/ programme manager to understand early enough the mechanism of how the expected change is produced.

6. Should only problematic projects be ROM-ed?

As mentioned in the explanation above, the main benefit from ROM is in looking at the "problematic" areas. However, as the ROM exercise provides recommendations to ensure the achievement of the planned results, programmes might also consider ROM to the projects that are supposed to bring **significant contribution to the achievement of programme indicators.** On top of this, ROM exercise can help to identify good practices in the projects that can be shared with the others.

ROM planning and templates

7. How long is a ROM mission?

There is no specific formula to establish the duration, as many factors come into play, like complexity of the project, number of participating countries and distances between the interviewees/ project sites to be visited. However, it has to be taken into account that the ROM exercise consists of:

- **Desk phase:** review of the project-related documentation;
- **Field phase:** interviews with the beneficiaries and stakeholders;
- **Reporting:** writing the conclusions/ recommendations.

For the ROM carried out by external experts the duration of the entire exercise for one project/ programme can take up to 1.5 months. Compared to the exercises involving external experts, some time savings can be considered in cases where programme staff is involved in the exercise:

- Shorter desk research time needed to understand the project/ programme environment;
- Carrying out ROM sessions in parallel for several projects at the same location;
- Carrying out a "lighter" exercise than foreseen in the standard methodology.

8. When in the project lifetime should ROM be done?

As a general rule, ROM should be performed when there is sufficient information to analyse implementation, but - at the same time - not too late to incorporate actions that could improve the project achievements.

It is not recommended to carry out ROM in the very beginning of the project, as this will not allow to draw conclusions on its performance. It is also not useful to do it at the very final stage of the project, as in this case there will be only limited (or none) time for implementation of the ROM recommendations.

9. What information should be included in the final ROM report?

The factsheet on ROM in the ENI CBC programmes suggests two reporting documents:

- **Monitoring question report**, which includes findings for each question and a summary of findings for each criterion (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability).
- **Final ROM report,** which provides conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

10. Can the criteria related to impact and coherence be also added, in line with the new OECD guide?

There is some flexibility for the ENI CBC programmes in adapting the ROM methodology, so the criteria and the monitoring questions can be adapted to their specific needs. However, it is important that the same criteria are looked at in cases of repeated ROM exercise to ensure comparison of ROM results. Also, the use of a similar methodology across ENI CBC programmes has potential advantages, like joint drawing of lessons, improving capacities, exchange of experience, as well as possible peer reviews.

As to the specific criteria:

- Some aspects related to the **coherence** are already integrated in the monitoring questions. However, for more thorough review of this criterion additional questions can be added;
- For the potential **impact** (which previously was part of the ROM methodology) often the conclusion was that the timing of the ROM exercise is too early to be able to make a proper assessment. Moreover, impact assessment requires quite sophisticated methods and tools, and the ROM approach - based on desk research and interviews - might not be sufficient to fully capture it.

11. Can ROM be carried out by the JTS staff?

Yes, this is possible. Several ENI CBC programmes plan the use of their internal staff resources for the ROM, either involving the MA/JTS staff or other staff in the institutions hosting the MA/JTS (e.g. evaluation unit). In any case, some level of independence from the project officer in charge of the project day-to-day monitoring has to be ensured.

12. If the JTS staff member collects information, can the MA do the analysis?

It is recommended that the same expert who reviews the project documents and does interviews also produces the report, including conclusions and recommendations. The MA has to be involved in the review of the provided conclusions and recommendations, as well as channelling them to the project. Based on the outcome of the exercise, an action plan has to be developed, and the MA/JTS need to follow it up.

13. Can ROM be done without interviews, based on the desk research only?

There is experience of integrating the ROM aspects into the self-evaluation of the project beneficiaries during the ENPI CBC period. However, this exercise does not provide the full benefits of the ROM. Experience of the ROM experts shows that interviews are a very essential source of information for data collection and arriving at conclusions and recommendations.

14. If ROM is done via an online questionnaire, should the target groups and final beneficiaries be also involved?

The involvement of the project stakeholders, that is, target groups and the final beneficiaries, is a distinctive feature of the ROM. The selection of the stakeholders is based on an inventory and assessment of who owns data and information that is needed to answer the monitoring questions. Taking into account the strong orientation of the exercise on the project results, their involvement cannot be neglected.

Methodologically, it is possible to define the "primary" groups (whose opinion is essential for the exercise) and "secondary" groups (useful, but not crucial). The most appropriate tools (face-to-face interviews, online interviews, online survey) can then be used for each of them.

15. How can programmes proceed with the ROM in the times of lockdown?

First of all, Managing Authorities need to adjust to the restrictions that are in force and use other means of communication that can replace face-to-face meetings, or even postpone the missions until the full-fledged implementation of the ROM activities is possible. On top of the travel-related restrictions, there is also another aspect that comes into play in the time of pandemics, namely, in the times of uncertainty it can be difficult (or even impossible) to assess all factors that could affect the project.

Carrying out ROM

16. Several questions in the ROM template cover aspects that were assessed during the project selection. What is the link between project assessment and ROM?

Project assessment during the selection process is an ex-ante exercise in which assessment is done based on the plans and forecasts. And, even if aspects covered by ROM are similar (e.g., relevance, effectiveness), the assessment is made based on different data. ROM conclusions and recommendations are drawn based on data from the field, as well as operational processes and project achievements which were not in place during the project assessment.

Therefore, in a ROM review it is possible to confirm (or not) the conclusions from the project selection. It is possible to have a view also on the quality of the evaluation process.

In addition to this, if problematic points are discovered in ROM, they can be the basis for recommendations to the MA/JTS to improve the project selection process.

17. Who has to be interviewed? How to select the right stakeholders from those mentioned in the application form?

The project stakeholders to be interviewed (including target group, beneficiaries, implementation teams and others) should be identified based on the application form, and also as a result of the discussion with the project officer. It is important to understand their role and the information that they can provide.

Then, based on the monitoring questions and preliminary findings from the review of available documents, it should be possible to define the stakeholders who own the data that is needed to answer the questions, complementary to what is already collected in the desk research.

Based on this, an interview plan is outlined including what kind of data is needed and what questions are to be asked. The initial plan should always be subject to revision and optimisation, as it could be quite extensive and time consuming.

18. Should the project officer following the project be interviewed, too?

A discussion with the project manager following the project might help to understand what to focus on. The project manager could indicate directly what he or she thinks is essential, but at the same time it also has to be kept in mind that this is his/her subjective opinion. The discussion with the project manager is useful also for efficiency of the ROM process, giving a good orientation in the project environment, which sometimes can be quite complex.

19. Should I share the list of questions with the interviewees prior to the interview?

It is useful to send the interviewee in advance a list of topics that will be discussed; this will help them to prepare and feel more comfortable during the interview. It is suggested not to forward the whole list of the monitoring questions, as it can be overwhelming, especially since not all questions will be asked to each interviewee. If you need any specific data, it could be requested in advance.

20. How to make sure that the interviewees are sincere and provide a true picture of the project?

The expert has to create a positive relation with the interviewee and prepare the ground in order to have a constructive discussion. Some ideas for this could be:

- Explaining benefits of the exercise to the project and the interviewees;
- Explaining that this exercise does not have "consequences" in the form of financial cuts or penalties, but is aimed at improvement of the project performance;
- Not chasing problems, but rather concentrating on strengths and positive elements;
- Being useful in the discussion, providing ideas and insights;
- Having positive attitude that is reflected in the communication and thus creating a certain level of trust.

21. If a project has a large partnership, should all project partners be interviewed?

It would be advisable to cover as many of them as possible as interviews with all partners will help to better understand the project and formulate an opinion on what is expected to happen. However, not in all cases face-to-face interviews might be needed; online tools can be also used to reduce the time consumption in the ROM exercise.

22. In the ROM checklist monitoring questions under different criteria address similar issues. How can an expert avoid duplication of information when answering them?

Indeed, there are several monitoring questions that repeatedly refer to important elements of the project implementation, like outputs, results, and their measurement; capacity and delays. Examples below refer to these monitoring questions and provide an explanation of the specific aspects that they are supposed to cover:

Example1:

Questions in the "Relevance" section	Questions in the "Effectiveness" section
1.6. Indicators *- Are the indicators to measure results well defined and relevant to measure the achievement of the objectives?* *- Are the defined output indicators appropriate?*	*3.2. Is the quality of outputs satisfactory?* *- Based on your experience, what is the quality of outputs?* *- Do these outputs meet expectations of the grant beneficiaries and the target group(s)?*

- *Are the project indicators coherent with those on the programme level?* - *Are baselines and targets set for each indicator? Are the targets realistic?*	*3.3. Are the outputs still likely to lead to the expected results?* - *What is the level of achievement of results as reflected by indicators covering the specific objective?* - *Will the results be obtained within the set timeframe?* - *Are any corrective measures needed?*

At a first look, the questions in both sections may appear similar, as they refer to the outputs and results of the project and their measurement. Whereas when looking at the questions in detail, it becomes clear that the question under "Relevance" refers to the project indicators as they were designed in the application, whereas under "Effectiveness" the questions relate to the facts and evidence in the field. This evidence may or may not be the same as planned; there can be additional or different outputs than those initially planned. Good project management skills and understanding of the application is necessary to describe the "Relevance", whereas for the "Effectiveness" also sectorial expertise might be useful.

A second potential duplication of information could regard the delays mention in the sections on "Efficiency" and "Effectiveness":

Example 2:

Question on delays in section "Efficiency"	**Question on delays in section "Effectiveness"**
2.3 Delays - *If there are delays, how important are they and what are the consequences?* - *What are the reasons for these delays and to what extent have appropriate corrective measures been implemented?* - *To what extent has the planning been revised accordingly?*	*3.1. Is the progress of each output conforming to plan?* - *Is the delivery of outputs in line with the plan?* - *To what extent is the expected progress in terms of outputs satisfactory?* - *If there are deviations, what are their implications?*

In this case, the questions in the "Efficiency" section specifically refer to the processes in the project, whereas under "Effectiveness" the delivery of outputs according to the planned schedule is looked at.

And the last example is about the questions related to the capacity:

Example 3:

Question on capacity in "Relevance"	**Question on capacity in "Efficiency"**	**Question on capacity in "Sustainability"**

1.2. *Is the project adapted to the present institutional, human and financial* ***capacities of the beneficiaries and/ or other key stakeholders?*** - *Does the project correspond to the existing capacities of the project beneficiaries?* - *Is the project addressing the problem in a more advanced manner compared to the interventions in the past?*	*2.1. Are the chosen project* ***implementation mechanisms*** *conducive for achieving the expected results?* - *Are the roles and responsibilities well divided and clear to all beneficiaries?* - *Is the internal communication and coordination clear to all beneficiaries and is it working?*	*4.1. Are key stakeholders acquiring the necessary* ***institutional and human capacities*** *to ensure the continued flow of benefits?* - *Is there evidence of strengthening the human, organisational capacities?* - *Is there an adequate level of human and institutional capacity put in place to continue delivering project's benefits upon finalisation of the project implementation period?*

Here, in the "Relevance" section capacity is approached from the project design point of view (i.e., whether the project was designed or not according to the capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders). In the "Efficiency" section the actual capacities of the beneficiaries implementing the project are looked at, as well as the mechanisms in place. Whereas "Sustainability" of the capacity is about the existence (or acquisition) of the necessary capacity to continue the benefits upon finalisation of the project.

23. How realistic is the implementation of recommendations related to project indicators?

This very much depends on the type of the recommendation. For example, if the indicators defined in the project do not really capture what the project is doing, additional and better suited indicators can be suggested; or, if there is a clear contribution of a project to a common indicator of the programme, the use of such indicator could be beneficial both for the project and the programme. However, such recommendations need to be proposed with great care in order not to create too complex indicators framework and avoid possible difficult or costly measurements.

Additional questions

24. What is the role of the EC in the ROM exercise? Do they expect to receive ROM reports from the programmes?

In recent years, the European Commission has enhanced its **focus on results-oriented management and established an EU Results Framework** (EU RF) to report on the results of EU development cooperation at corporate level.

Its aim was to align the framework with the evolving context of international cooperation at EU and international level.

The EU RF tracks on:

- development progress in partner countries: i.e. the medium/long term development impact achieved in partnership and collaboration with partner governments, donors and other development actors including the private sector and civil society.
- development outcome and outputs to which EU-funded programmes contributed.

On one hand, the ROM is aimed to **review the performance of an on-going programme**, with focus on its results, and to **suggest appropriate actions for improvement**. The role of EC in ROM exercise is to ensure that the programmes are seen through to a successful conclusion, the specific priorities are met and that the money is well spent. This was the case of the ROM missions conducted for each of the ENI CBC Programmes during 2018-2019.

On the other hand, **the EC role in this ROM missions is to assess the performance of the EU financial Instruments**, in order to draw lessons for the new generations of programmes. This was the case of the ROM evaluation of the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in the EU neighbourhood funded in the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) 2007-2013.

The Commission services monitor implementation of the programmes based on progress and completion reports from implementing partners crosschecking the information presented in the reports with data from other sources (e.g. direct observation through field visits, ROM reviews, evaluations, project steering committee meetings with key stakeholders). Reporting on result values, as submitted by the Programmes' implementing entities, are subject to quality checks, and can be aggregated to report at higher levels through results frameworks.

25. What about the programme-level ROM? Shall the EC carry out another ROM mission?

DG REGIO acknowledges the added value and opportunities provided by the ROM exercise. It has made sure to have the possibility to launch another ROM for ENI CBC programmes if the occasion occurs as well as to keep this option for the future programming period.