**RBM strategic guidelines for the “Monitoring and Learning Strategy for change”**

**USAID-SICA-PNUD Project**

***Evaluation Area. UNDP RBLAC-RSC***

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# Context

## Background

The Central America Security Strategy, CASS, serves as the SICA’s guiding framework for defining common objectives, areas of intervention, and the legal measures to be taken by countries to harmonize and coordinate regional security interventions. The CASS also ensures that all projects emanating from this strategy are based **on planning and results-based management.** It defined four core components[[1]](#footnote-1), 14 priorities and 22 regional projects **to translate the Security Strategy into a tangible and coordinated action for the region.**

In order to provide the SICA Member States with regular and systematized information for improved decision-making and formulation of security and coexistence policies, the **Observatory of Democratic Security Index in Central America (OBSICA)** was created in 2010. The OBSICA serves as a regional mechanism for **monitoring, evaluation and analysis of official information** on Democratic Security, **monitoring and systematization of progress indicators** of the CASS and of specific regional projects derived from it. The two components of OBSICA - *Monitoring of Democratic Security situation in Central America* and *Research and Analysis* - focus on Regional Security, Citizen Security/Security of Persons and Property, and Democratic Governance/Rule of Law.

Currently, the **OBSICA in cooperation with the CISALVA, is collecting the regional citizen security data** in the framework of the Project Regional System of Standardized Indicators (**SES**) supported by the IADB, OAS, UNODC and UNDP. This data includes 12 Citizen Security indicators from administrative registers and 10 indicators from national surveys.

Despite the advances in strengthening of SICA’s institutional structure and technical expertise, **there still is a notable lack of capacities to implement the CASS and to measure the impact of the CASS projects**. Efforts have also been made to strengthen the OBSICA, through CISALVA Project, which targets the information collection and analysis capacities. However, **OBSICA still lacks the capacities to collect and process reliable and uniform regional citizen security data that would contribute to national and regional CS policies**. Engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) with public sector institutions on citizen security issues has been sporadic. SICA has made little progress in working with the CSOs at the regional level and currently there are no policy debates in SICA that would effectively engage the governments and civil society leaders on citizen security issues[[2]](#footnote-2). **The SICA Consultative Committee** (CC-SICA), created in 1996 as an independent and autonomous civil society body to promote active participation of civil society, **remains inoperative**, due to the complex convening procedures. Furthermore, vast regional experience on crime prevention initiatives, including best practices, lessons learned and research is not broadly shared. This **lack of knowledge sharing** limits the replication of effective strategies to tackle common citizen security problems.

## Project description

### Goal and specific objectives

Through this Project, the UNDP proposes to *strengthen evidence-based policy making by improving the quality and comparability of regional citizen security statistics and increasing regional coordination and collaboration on effective citizen security strategies.*

In view of the above problems, the Project **aims to** **support SICA** in *strengthening the regional and national institutional capacities for collecting, monitoring and processing security information and for its application for decision-making and policy formulation at regional and national levels.* *It intends* **to strengthen the Civil Society** *participation in the collection, analysis and processing the quality citizen security data and in the formulation and monitoring of the Citizen Security policies and programmes. The Project also intends to support regional initiatives to* **share and learn from national and regional Citizen Security best practices***, to enhance knowledge and understanding of root causes of violence and insecurity and to promote successful citizen security policies and practices.*

### Approach

The Project contemplates a **two-pronged approach**, *staging interventions at* *regional and national levels* and *engaging national and regional institutions and civil society* in which regional, national and local levels are inter-related and compromised in the achievement of the expected results:

* **Regional: strengthening of regional capacities** 🡪 strengthen the SICA *Observatory of Democratic Security Index in Central America* (OBSICA) and support its work by creating a regional network of civil society organizations for monitoring and oversight of analysis produced by OBSICA; strengthen SUT coordination mechanism; strengthen the regional CSO network *Red de Observatorios Centroamericanos* (ROC) including the national academia, NGOs, the private sector, and think tanks (eg. FLACSO)
* **National: strengthening national institutional capacities** 🡪 identify key government institutions such as police, justice, forensic medicine, public health and *strengthen their capacities to review and analyze citizen security data*; build confidence among institutions and their representatives, giving them a perception of legitimacy to share data, and support national institutions to improve their analysis capacity of national and regional issues and coordinate national efforts: national statistic systems, national crime observatories, civil society organizations; strengthen the access of the civil society to national citizen security information
* **Local: strengthening the civil society participation** 🡪 support selected CSOs working on citizen security, preferably well-known academic institutions, strengthening their capacities for data analysis and its application for planning, elaboration of action proposals and contributions to public policies.

The Project will apply 3 inter-related mainstreaming strategies to achieve the results: *Capacity Development, Knowledge Management through SSC* and *Communication and advocacy.*

It will build on the experience of the Regional SICA-UNDP-AECID Project *Security in Central America,* which aims at strengthening the capacities of national and regional institutions for the implementation of CASS. The Project will also complement the efforts of the CISALVA *Project on Regional System of Standardized Indicators* (SES) to strengthen the OBSICA’s ad-hoc Sub Technical Units (SUTs) in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua and install permanent technical capacities within the OBSICA.

In line with the UNDP approach the Project will build on the existing institutional and human “assets” existing in the target countries and contribute mechanisms and tools for their strengthening and development.

### Targeted countries

Through this Project, the UNDP will target **primarily the Northern Triangle countries**: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras strengthening the existing capacities created under the SES Project. There is also a proposal to include Panama and Belize in the activities envisaged under the IR 2, namely in the knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices, engagement of civil society organizations and their participation in regional forums.

It’s also under consideration to involve the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, as well as other sub regional allies from the IADB-CISALVA SES Project, which have established the ad-hoc SUTs. The Project will complement the existing efforts by strengthening the SUTs’ technical capacities and establishing mechanisms for their permanent integration in OBSICA. Participation of other Central American countries will be considered based on the priorities of and upon consultation with the SICA.

### Stakeholders and beneficiary

The Project will be implemented by **UNDP in close collaboration with the Central American Integration System (SICA)**. **UNDP will be responsible for the implementation** of the Project activities and execution of the Project funds at the regional and national levels, in line with the established Project objectives, relevant strategic and programmatic frameworks and cooperation/funding agreements.

The **Central American Integration System (SICA) is the main stakeholder and beneficiary of the Project**. SICA will be represented at the strategic political level of the Project, contributing to the overall political decision-making and coordination with the UN and USAID and will benefit through strengthened national and regional information management, coordination and policy-making capacities.

# Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change

The *Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change* we propose will provide a framework 1) *to ensure achievement of development results*, 2) *to promote evidence-based decision-making* and 3) *to encourage learning for behavioral change throughout the life of the project*, by producing timely, relevant, reliable and accessible information and accurate data analysis.

This Strategy shouldn’t be an isolated action but an integrated part of a whole *Result based Management Strategy*, what implies that every part of the project cycle, including *Monitoring,* is focus on the achievement of development results and changes on people’s life as stated in the Theory of Change formulated during the design phase.

Given the nature of the initiative, the *Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change* should integrate as much as possible with the monitoring system that the project is aimed to strengthen: OBSICA. In this regard the Strategy will focus on two purposes:

1. **STRATEGIC MONITOTING: ensuring** **pertinence and pursuing sustainability** **of the outcome-level contributions** **of the Project in relation to the Regional Programme priorities**. For this purpose, Regional Programme outcome level indicators should be tracked*.* Important indicators for the strategic monitoring are the formulation of performance indicators. This indicators to ensure the accomplishment of key milestones as indicate in the Theory of Change.
2. **OPERATIONAL MONITORING: Ensuring efficiency and effectiveness** **of the Project** **by strengthening** **OBSICA and CISALVA** as monitoring mechanisms.

In this sense, the Strategy should accomplish the following specific objectives responding to both the Regional Programme and the main beneficiary SICA:

* Institute quality assurance and design adjustments for stronger contributions;
* Assure accountability to SICA and USAID on project results and proper use of resource transfers;
* Guide progress, and achievement of project outcome and outputs to ensure achievement of desired changes and project contributions;
* Inform and promote evidence-based decision making in SICA and UNDP;
* Provide accurate information on appropriateness, effectiveness, and relevance of project approaches; and
* Extract lessons learned, good practices and capture the “story” to feed the project cycle and lastly to systematize the experiences to set the steps for *replicability*.

Monitoring is part of project management, not an addition to it, and it shouldn’t be regarded as merely a reporting requirement during the implementation of the Project. Rather, it should be regarded as an opportunity to:

* **Engage beneficiaries (SICA, national institutions, civil society)** so that they feel ownership of results being achieved and are motivated to sustain them.
* **Demonstrate achievement of development results** (outcome level: *Countries are able to reduce the likelihood of conflict and lower the risk of natural events, including those resulting from climate change*; output level: *Communities empowered and security sector institutions enabled for increased citizen safety and reduced levels of armed violence*), how they benefit SICA, national institutions and civil society, and leverage support of these beneficiaries and other stakeholders to address any operational challenges faced.
* **Learn from the experience** **of the project** **and push behavioral changes at regional and national level** from learnt lessons and best practices.

Following this reasoning, the Evaluation Area recommends nurturing an inclusive and purposeful monitoring culture to make implementation and management effective and interesting as well as to ease gathering of data and evidence objectively to back achievements and make decisions.

## Strategic guidelines

The UNDP Regional Centre in Panama has a dedicated *Evaluation Area* which ensures the adherence of UNDP programmes and projects with the corporate **Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines and RBM approach stipulated in the UNDP** *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results*.

Based on its previous work with SICA and having accumulated a substantive experience in developing M&E and KM strategies in the region, this Area appears as a key partner to develop the *Monitoring and Learning Strategy*. Being responsible to **support the Project Coordination team providing quality control of the Monitoring implementation**, the Evaluation Area purposes the following structure and guidelines to design the *Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change*:

Chart 1. Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change cycle

Source: prepared by the author. Panama, 2013.

The chart shown represents the logic beneath the *Monitoring and Learning Strategy for Change*. First of all, to ensure the implementation of a **results oriented monitoring**, RBM approach must be adopted since the beginning. This implies verification of a results oriented planning and coherent SMART results framework, and understanding of the Theory of Change: what we want to get and which changes are needed to reach it. Second, it’s very important to have the management aligned and compromised with RBM strategy all across the project cycle and project life. Third, Monitoring Plan must be defined to set how the monitoring process will be addressed and to ensure results based monitoring at both strategic and operational levels. Fourth, it must be ensured monitoring implementation provides useful and relevant information for decision makers and all the actors involved in the project. In order to promote behavioral changes and evidence-based decision making, cycle should close with the use of monitoring reports through dissemination of knowledge and the information generated in the process. *Monitoring and Learning Strategy for change* will serve to feed the Evaluation of the Project *(see annex)* since it will provide ground and relevant information about the progress on the achievement of Project’s expected results and will serve as evidence for decision making.

1. **RESULTS ORIENTED PLANNING:** The role of the Evaluation Area will be to ensure a result based monitoring as part of the RBM approach. So the first step will be to assure result oriented planning in the project formulation. In order to promote changes in people’s life, planning should focus on the changes needed to reach the expected results. Afterwards, it will be easy to identify “what and for what” to monitor at both **operational and strategic levels**. If we do not act at a strategic level, we won’t be able to promote development results and changes in people’s life. This implies:
	1. **Formulation of SMART result framework:** the **results** (outcomes and outputs) **must be defined according to** the formulation of the project and the **desired changes**. Then, results must address behavioral changes or changes in people’s lives, and in this sense they must be formulated 🡪**for what!** But consistency and coherence not only must exist with the formulation, but **also along the results chain**, giving logic to the Theory of Change beneath.

The results framework doesn’t have to be stuck, rather it should be possible to adapt it in case of context change, high risks or recommended.

* 1. **Formulation of SMART indicators**: results must have their correspondent **indicators formulated according to the SMART criteria** and focus on the expected and desired changes. Once the indicators are identified, the stakeholders should establish **baselines and targets for the level of change** they would like to see. *Without* baseline data, it is very difficult to measure change over time or to monitor and evaluate. *With* baseline data, progress can be measured against the situation that prevailed before an intervention.
	2. **Gender approach**: check that gender approach is incorporated in the results framework 🡪 results and indicators formulation.
1. **MANAGEMENT MODEL:** project should be managed by a results oriented governance team who promotes a results oriented management approach. Moreover, the **governance team should promote an RBM culture** among the project team members, stakeholders and beneficiaries, and make everybody feel responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluating in order to reach the expected development results. In order to reach this, the Evaluation Area will be responsible to **generate ownership of the RBM** approach in the management for what it purposes:
	1. **Monitoring team would be formed by two professionals responsible to oversight and coordinate the monitoring function**: one professional responsible for operational monitoring working close to the implementation team in El Salvador, and one professional responsible for strategic monitoring working in the Regional Centre. Both would work on a jointly and articulated way.
	2. **RBM training of the project team** (coordination and implementation) at the outset of the project to provide **a common understanding of RBM and to align concepts, as well as to promote ownership of the RBM** culture through the transference of knowledge. Additional trainings are suggested during the Project cycle (*one per year, for example*) to **ensure evidence based decision making and learning** through the use of operational and strategic monitoring results.
2. **MONITORING PLAN:** UNDP-SICA will develop a Monitoring Plan and will submit it to USAID within 60 days after the Agreement is signed. The Plan should define the **steps for the monitoring process**, the **monitoring matrix** and assign the **financial resources** needed for its accomplishment. As part of the methodology, this Plan will call for a **mixed methods approach** incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The Monitoring Plan indicators will comply with the UNDP **SMART criteria**. Monitoring Plan is critical for **managing, tracking, assessing and reporting project progress and achievements on both operational and strategic levels**. The information provided will serve to feed the project cycle in order to implement corrections or changes in the initial project formulation to adapt to new possible circumstances. The **Monitoring Plan is designed to serve as guide to the Project Team** indicating a systematic, timely and reliable collection of performance data within a specific time frame. When planning monitoring, it’s also very important to **identify the key milestones that ensure the continuity of the Theory of Change** and so, the achievement of the expected results. In order to monitor the achievement of these key milestones, performance indicators should be formulated. Then, Plan should provide clear indication for *1) Data collection and analysis*, *2) Reporting mechanisms*, *3) Roles and responsibilities*, and *4) Risks and assumptions*. In this case, the support of the Evaluation Area will be key in order to assure the strategic approach in the Monitoring Plan, and to promote the commitment of the management.
3. **MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION:** The Monitoring Team will ensure the **accomplishment of the Monitoring Plan** during the monitoring process, which at the same time will follow the procedures as established in the **UNDP Programme and Operation Policies and Procedures (POPP)**. The Evaluation Area will lead the Monitoring Team to ensure that the monitoring process is inclusive and participatory, and provides relevant and useful information for decision makers for management purposes, not only reporting. UNDP will ensure that specific *USAID Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements* are duly reflected in the Project. The process will entail monitor and report on **program activities** on monthly, quarterly, bi-quarterly and annual basis, as stated in the Monitoring Plan. To collect accurate data, various **monitoring techniques or methods for tracking progress** would be adopted. The monitoring system would incorporate not only the *Monitoring Team’s inputs and observations but also feedback and data from the whole Project Team, beneficiaries and the stakeholders*. The Monitoring Team would provide monitoring of project outcome and outputs contributions while conducting data quality assessment to ensure that data collected *comply with the UNDP standards of validity, integrity, precision, reliability and timeliness and contribute to wider program results*.
4. **USE OF MONITORING REPORTS:** monitoring strengthens the basis for managing for results, since it **fosters learning and knowledge generation**during the project cycle, and **supports the evidence-based decision** **making** by providing relevant and useful information. The Evaluation Area will support the Monitoring Team to guarantee the existence of management mechanisms to create the link between the monitoring function and decision making; it will also encourage a participatory and inclusive process to assure the utility and relevance of information generated, and will support the promotion of communication mechanisms to keep all actors and beneficiaries informed to ensure accountability and transparency. Two components will be key in this phase:
	1. **Knowledge transference**: as monitoring provides information to feed the project cycle, the **learning is the result of using this information to take evidence-based decision and push the needed changes** to adjust, correct or assert the initial project formulation and Theory of Change. The monitoring function will not only capture the results but also the *learnt lessons, recommendations and good practices* that can help for scaling-up and replication. This goes beyond the systematization of this information and establishes **mechanisms to reach the different targets** (e.g. decision makers), **and make use of the monitoring results to influence the people’s behavior** and drive transformational changes. In this sense it’d be appropriate to approach the strategy as a development solution that involves capacity development, knowledge management, innovation, communication and Results Based Management since the beginning of the project.
	2. **Communication.** Communication allows the **flow of information along the project cycle** and, in order to be effective, it must be defined **what communicate, whom to communicate and how to do it at the outset**. One premise very important in this sense is the definition of *roles and responsibilities, and the identification of all actors and stakeholders*. Communication mechanisms must be established depending on the objective, both with internal and external aspects:
		1. **Communication of the process of monitoring**: all parts affected by the monitoring process must be involved since the beginning and must participate to *ensure ownership of the process and so fostering the use of the monitoring* reports.
		2. **Communication during the process of monitoring**: mechanisms to ensure good *flow of information on a dialogue basis*, both inside the UNDP and with actors and stakeholders outside the organization: SICA, national institutions and civil society.
		3. **Communication of the results of the monitoring reports**: define target and communication channel and tool to *communicate the information gathered and facilitate learning for change* and evidence-based decision making

# Annex

*Monitoring and Learning for change Strategy* will serve to feed the Evaluation of the Project since it will provide ground and relevant information about the progress on the achievement of Project’s expected results.

**Mid-Term Review**

By the end of 18 months the Project will undergo internal Mid-term Evaluation conducted by the Project Monitoring and Evaluation Expert/Monitoring and Evaluation team with the support of the UNDP Regional M&E Team in Panama. The purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation is to review the Project progress and key challenges and advise if adjustments need to be made to the Project document and/or the budget.

**Final Evaluation**

An independent final external evaluation is planned at the end of the project cycle. The evaluation process will be conducted by an external evaluation firm or group of consultants hired for the exercise, with the direct participation of all stakeholders in implementation. The evaluation will focus on the outcome and output level and options to scale, the program's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and potential sustainability, and lessons learned and good practices can be used for a future project.

All relevant findings of the evaluation will be shared with all the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the project. Stakeholders that will be interviewed during the evaluation will include regional institutions, such as SICA, particularly the Directorate of Democratic Security, SICA country members, the regional observatory (OBSICA), public sector institutions in charge of crime data collection in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, civil society organizations, other donors, and other relevant stakeholders.

1. Fighting crime; prevention of violence; Rehabilitation, reintegration and prison security; and Strengthening institutional coordination and monitoring of the regional strategy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Since the regional CSOs require the approval of all Member states to convene, the CC-SICA still has not been able to call its first meeting of Civil Society Organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)