Community monitoring and evaluation methods survey

A shared learning resource from the EVALOC project

EVALOC

EVALUATING LOW CARBON COMMUNITIES

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Written by: Jo Hamilton
Lower Carbon Futures, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3QY

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For more information on EVALOC project, please visit: **www.evaloc.org.uk** or contact Professor Rajat Gupta, rgupta@brookes.ac.uk

Images front cover (from top to bottom, left to right): *EVALOC team; EVALOC team; https://www.transitionnetwork.org/news/2015-09-14/small-powerful-transition-action-hungary; http://www.lowcarbonwestoxford.org.uk/; EVALOC team* | **Back cover** (from left to right): *EVALOC team; A step by step guide to monitoring and evaluation report (MESC)*

Image: EVALOC team

Purpose of report

The Evaluation Methods survey aimed to give a broad insight into the existing levels of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) undertaken by Low Carbon Community Groups and Transition Initiatives, and explore the M&E needs and priorities of these groups. The survey arose out of collaboration between the EVALOC research project, the Transition Network and the Transition Research Network (TRN) , and will contribute to the production of EVALOC research outputs (evaluation resources) and greater knowledge about the current state of M&E that exists within low carbon community groups and transition initiatives.

This report presents the methodology and results of the survey.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the LCC organisations who participated in the survey. Thanks also to the EVALOC project team, in particular Ruth Mayne who provided valuable comments on the report and input into the design of the survey as well as the Transition Network and Transition Research Network for their help in designing the survey.

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Aims and methodology

1.1 Survey aims

The Evaluation Methods survey aimed to give a broad insight into the existing levels of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) undertaken by Low Carbon Community Groups and Transition Initiatives, and explore the M&E needs and priorities of these groups. The survey arose out of collaboration between the EVALOC research project, the Transition Network and the Transition Research Network (TRN)[1], and will contribute to the production of EVALOC research outputs (evaluation resources) and greater knowledge about the current state of M&E that exists within low carbon community groups and transition initiatives.

1.2 Methodology

The survey[2] was conducted online between July - November 2012. Survey Monkey software was used for data collection. All survey questions were in English. Most of the questions were multiple choice, although open questions were also used. This analysis includes all responses collected up until mid-November 2012, when the survey was closed. The list of survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

The survey invitation was distributed electronically via the Transition Network newsletter (August 2012) and website, the Transition Research Network, Low Carbon Communities Network[3] newsletter, and Rob Hopkins' 'Transition Culture' blog[4]. The distribution channels which triggered the most responses were the Transition Network newsletter and the Transition Culture blog.

1.2.1 Terms used

We are aware that the terms 'monitor' and 'evaluate' (M&E) can describe a range of activities and processes concerned with the collection and analysis of a range of different data, and overall assessment of how a project performs in comparison with its stated goals. The variety of processes, type and amount of data can vary in intensity and degree of formality. We wanted to include M&E in the broadest sense, and gave this wording at the beginning of the online questionnaire: *'For the purposes of this questionnaire, the terms 'monitor' and / or 'evaluate' mean ANY information that you collect which tells you about your work'.* For this report, M&E will be a convenient short hand for monitoring and / or evaluating.

We are aware that there are many different terms for community based organisations who are taking local action on climate change, energy, peak oil, community resilience and sustainability issues. These can be described as Low Carbon Community Groups, Community Energy Groups, Transition Initiatives, or environmental partnerships. For this report, we will use the term 'community organisation' to describe these community based organisations.

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[1] The Transition Research Network aims to support research that is mutually beneficial for Transition Initiatives (part of the Transition Towns movement) and academic researchers. http://www.transitionresearchnetwork.org/

[2] Designed by Jo Hamilton and Ruth Mayne, Environmental Change Institute, with input from the Transition Research Network and Transition Network.

[3] The aim of the Low Carbon Communities Network (LCCN) is to encourage the adoption of low carbon and zero carbon technologies and lifestyles at a community level, and to enable groups engaged in this to be as effective and efficient as possible. http://lowcarboncommunities.org/

[4] http://transitionculture.org/2012/07/19/please-fill-out-this-quick-survey-to-help-us-to-help-you-evaluate-your-transition-impact/

Chapter 2
Presentation and discussion of results

This analysis presents and discusses the survey results. Part of this analysis presents the results to allow a distinction between UK based respondents and those from the rest of the world. This is to allow a more accurate reflection of the M&E needs for UK based community organisations, which was the prime motivation for the survey.

2.1 Respondents

114 responses were received in total, from individuals responding on behalf of their community organisation. Once duplications and empty responses had been removed, this left a total of 102 responses, which form the basis of this analysis. Of these, just over half (55) were from UK based community organisations. 47 responses were received from the rest of the world, which comprised of the rest of Europe (15) North America (23), South America (2), Africa (1) and Australasia (6). Respondents who weren't part of any relevant organisation were removed from the analysis, as were blank responses. In the few cases where more than one response from an organisation was received, the answers were merged, and the organisation only counted once. The analysis of the questions is based on the responses received for that specific question.

The range of organisations represented are illustrated is Figure 1. Respondents were invited to tick all the categories that applied to their organisation. 130 responses were received in total for this question, so (whilst) some respondents ticked more than one description, it is clear that most are responding about a specific 'Transition Initiative', with an even split between the UK and the rest of the world. The category of 'Low Carbon Community Group' refers to groups who are working on climate and energy issues, four of whom were also Transition Initiatives. Distinct projects within existing initiatives refer to a specific focused project within a larger community organisation (for example a household energy group), but not the entire wider group. 'Community energy projects' refer to groups who are specifically focused on energy, again there were overlaps between Transition Initiatives and Low Carbon Community groups here. Local Authorities referred to the local government, partnerships of organisations / agencies consisted of larger city-wide transition initiatives, centres, or larger projects involving many partner organisations.

Of those who ticked the 'other' category, the three UK groups comprised of two recycling / reuse groups, and one Community Interest Company working on sustainability in the non-formal education community. The remaining nine organisations across the world were a mixture of two practical local projects (farmers market, community service co-op), four small-scale geographically based transition type projects, two larger transition type projects, and one online networking hub for Transition Initiatives in California.
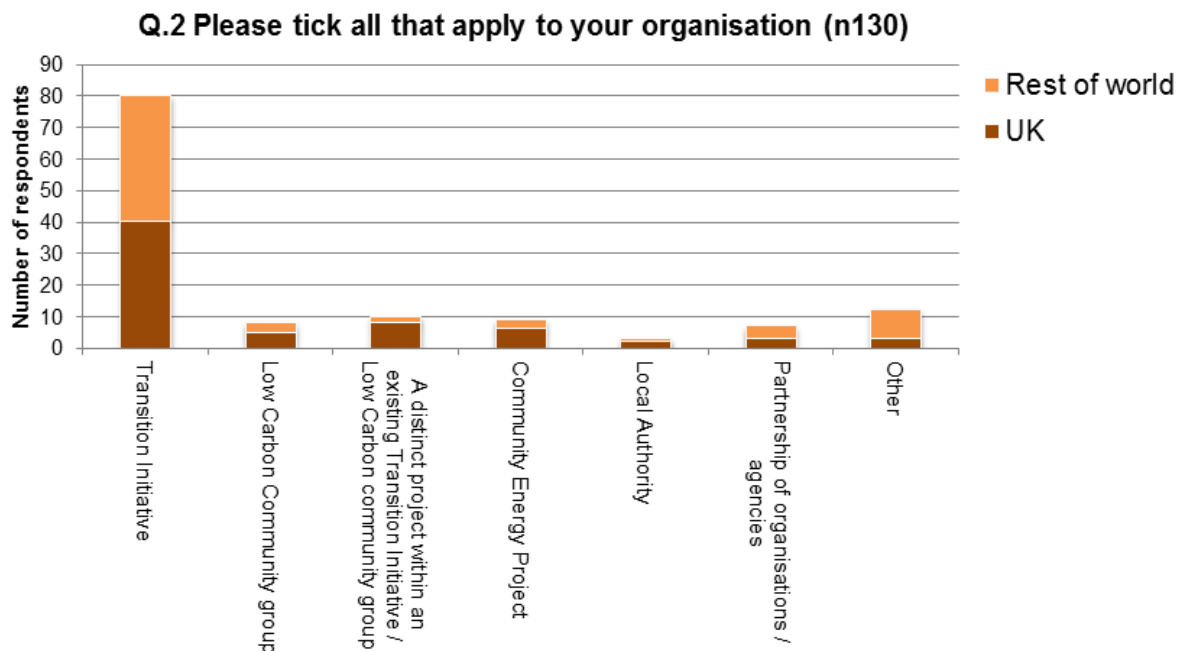

Figure 1. Description of survey respondent organisations.

2.2 How many community organisations are already monitoring and/or evaluating their work?

Of the 101 respondents, 58.4% monitored / evaluated some part of their work, and 41.6% did not. Figure 2 represents the distribution of the responses between the UK and the rest of the world. It is clear that much M&E is already taking place within the community organisations. This report will present an overview of the type of M&E, and the organisations involved.
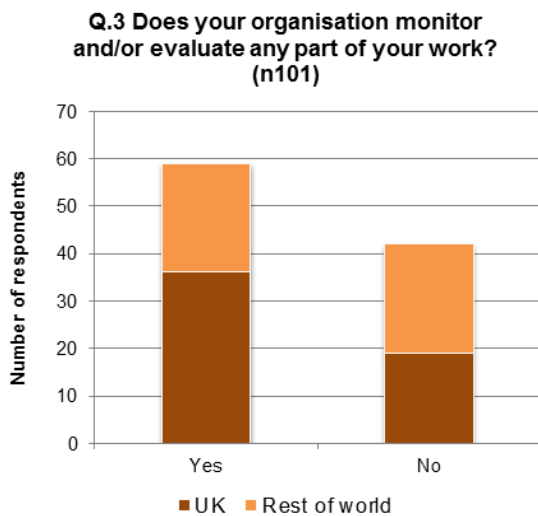

Q.3 Does your organisation monitor and/or evaluate any part of your work? (n101)

Figure 2. Responses to Q3. Does your organisation monitor or evaluate any part of your work?

2.3 Who is involved in the M&E?

M&E is conducted for a variety of reasons. Some organisations design and implement their own M&E, others are externally evaluated by other organisations, funders or through academic projects. We wanted to find out both who initiated the M&E systems (shown in Figure 3) and which organisations are involved in the different stages (shown in Figure 4).

We also wanted to explore which organisations are involved in the stages of Design, implementation, Analysis and Use of data, shown in Figure 4. The main organisations involved included the community organisation itself, universities and funders. This figure clearly shows that the community organisations are involved in the majority of these areas, indicating that there is a rich knowledge and experience of M&E to be investigated within the Transition Network and Low Carbon Communities Network.

For community organisations collaborating with University researchers / students, the University is

Did your organisation initiate the monitoring / evaluation? (n41)
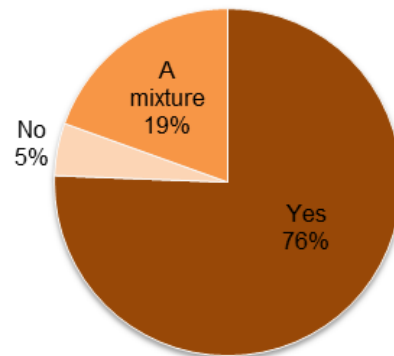
Figure 3. Responses to Q4. Did your organisation initiate the monitoring and/or evaluation?

involved throughout the M&E stages in four of the eight cases, and partly involved in the other cases. For community organisations involved with partner organisations, the partner organisations are involved throughout in 6 of the cases. Funders however appear to be involved in the design and use of the M&E processes, but not involved in the implementation (i.e. collecting the data), and only slightly involved in the data analysis.

Two other kinds of organisations were cited as being involved in the implementation of the M&E. The first, a community interest company (CIC), mentioned that their regulator requires stakeholder involvement in their M&E. The second respondent mentioned that their M&E fulfilled many purposes:

'We are in a process of continually improving our evaluation protocols. At the moment this effort is directed toward providing the evidential basis for our own strategic planning, but also a motivational device for the community as real-world feedback on accomplishments can be highly motivating. Our evaluation studies, such as they are, are also done partly to meet reporting requirements for some of our funders, plus developing a compendium of evidence-based history we draw upon in developing new project ideas and funding applications.'

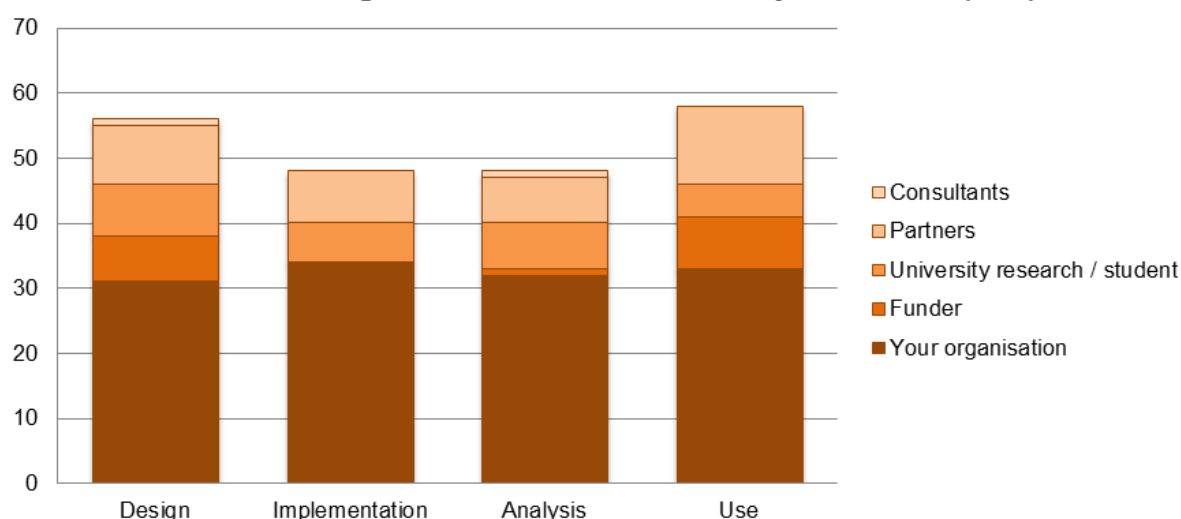## Q.5 Which organisations are involved in your M&E? (n58)

Figure 4. Responses to Q5. demonstrating type of organisations involved in the M&E of the survey respondents.

2.4 The purpose of M&E and the key lines of investigation

It is important to understand why community organisations are conducting M&E, as this can help inform the development of M&E, and demonstrate areas that other organisations may wish to focus on in the future. These questions were asked to the respondents who indicated that they already conducted some form of M&E.

Question 6 asked: 'What is the purpose of your monitoring / evaluation?'. 41 responses were received (shown in Figure 5) with the most popular responses being:

 1) 'to strengthen organisation / movement, e.g. by improving understanding of how change happens, project design / implementation, effectiveness and impact' (29 responses), and

2) ' to provide evidence to engage / motivate the wider community' (25 responses).

Other responses received included being accountable to their community or wider stakeholders (17 responses); providing evidence to influence local / national policy (12 responses); and to satisfy grant conditions (14 responses). Two 'other' responses were received, of which one mentioned the importance of demonstrating impact when applying for funding, whilst the other, an initiative less than a year old, was using the

Transition Network Diagnostic tool[5], and analysing research diaries.

To further investigate the purpose of the organisation's M&E, we asked Question 7: *'What are the key questions / lines of investigation you are seeking to address?'*

38 responses were received, which are presented in Figure 6. The most popular responses from the menu were:

1) 'Effectiveness – e.g. are you achieving your objectives / targets?' (90.6%)

2) 'Impacts / equity – e.g. does your organisation improve people's well-being? Who benefits and who bears the cost?' (56.3%).

'Effectiveness' is an overarching category here that also includes other lines of investigation such as community engagement. Nonetheless, it is clear that most of the community organisations do wish to assess whether they are achieving their objectives or targets, which supports the popular responses receive in Q6. Other categories were also considered significant, and reflected on the desire to investigate not just what the impacts of their actions were, but ways of working and the relevance to the people they wanted to involve. These themes are explored in more detail in section 3.7 when we asked

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[5]   For   details   of   the   tool   see: http://www.transitionnetwork.org/stories/ann-owen/2012-09/thrive-whats-it-all-about

Q.6 What is the purpose of your M&E? (n41)
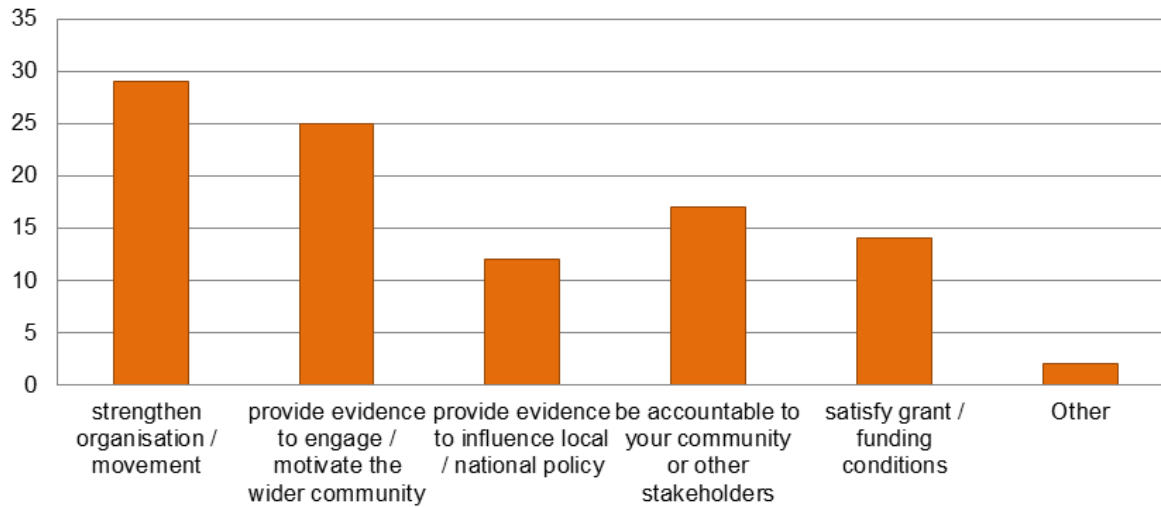
Figure 5. Responses to Q6. What is the purpose of your M&E?

Q7. What are the key questions / lines of investigation you are seeking to address? (n38)
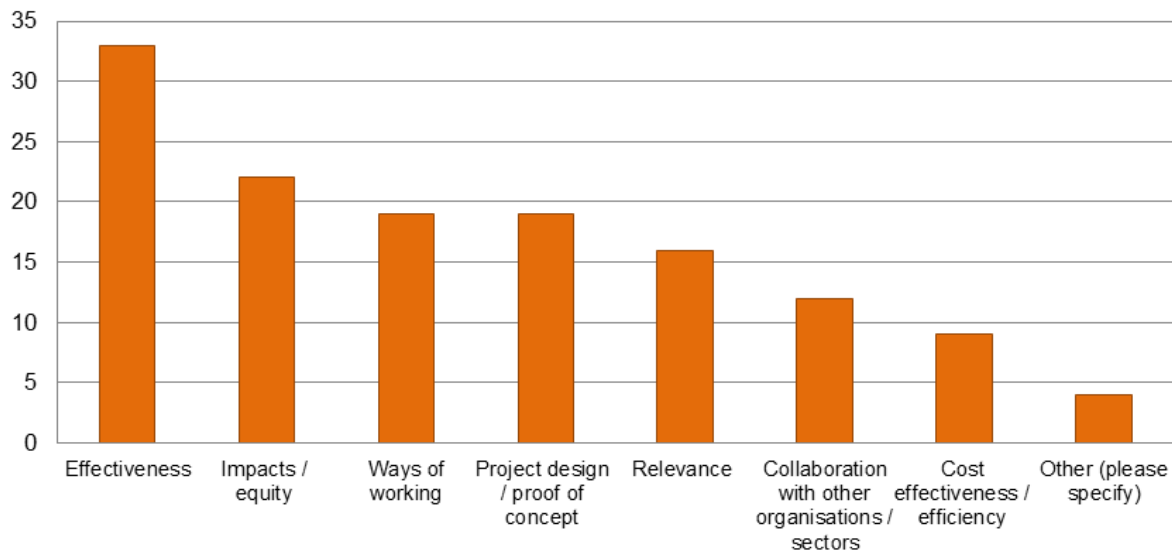
Figure 6. Responses to Q7. What are the key questions / lines of investigation you are seeking to address?

what advantages an M&E system would bring to their organisation.

Four comments were received in the 'other' category. These were: the number of people involved in the organisation, and the number of volunteer hours; being part of a community consultation for a low carbon and low cost housing project; not having the capacity to address the questions apart from monitoring attendance and event feedback; and informal evaluation within the groups combined with a regional needs analysis of transition Initiatives to organise training courses.

Full definitions for the columns in Q7:

- *Effectiveness* - e.g. are you achieving your objectives / targets?

- *Impacts / equity* - e.g. does your organisation improve people's well-being ? Who benefits and who bears the cost?

- *Ways of working* - e.g. are your internal organisational processes working well?

- *Project design / proof of concept* - e.g. what is working well/ what isn't, what do you need to change?

- *Relevance* - e.g. how relevant is your organisation to people you want to involve?

- *Collaboration with other organisations / sectors* - e.g. how well is the collaboration working?

- *Cost effectiveness / efficiency* - e.g. are you achieving your objectives / targets in a cost effective / efficient way?

- *Other (please specify)*

2.5 What areas are already being monitored and evaluated by community organisations, and what more is needed?

Questions 8 and 9 asked respondents to select the issues and indicators that they *currently* monitor /evaluate, and which they *would like* to monitor / evaluate in relation to different categories of issues. They were also invited to indicate if they are already carrying out monitoring and evaluation, and whether they would be continuing. The answers to these question were combined with the answers to Q15 and 16 (for respondents who didn't currently do any M&E) to capture what areas respondents who are not currently undertaking any M&E would like to investigate. The results have been presented according to their existing degree of M&E, and whether they come from the UK or the rest of the world.

Overall, around 45 respondents didn't respond to these questions (8, 9, 15 and 16) at all, even to respond that they don't currently M&E these areas. On reflection this could be due to the design of the survey (e.g. over-complicated) or lack of time for survey completion.

2.5.1 Organisational capacity and participation issues/indicators

These questions focused on the group as a whole, their capacity as a group, their reach into the community, and the types of participation and inclusion they are achieving. These are all subjective measures, but we hoped that by asking within these parameters, we could gain a snapshot of some of

the key issues, and the degree to which respondents felt them worthy of M&E.

Full definitions for the columns Q 8 and 15:

- *Organisational capability/sustainability* - e.g. volunteers, money, skills, understanding etc

- *Community capacity* - e.g. social networks; human, technical, and financial resources; skills, community organisations; partnerships/ collaborations

- *Community engagement/inclusion in your activities* - e.g. numbers/types of people your project aims to reach

- *Participation in your activities* - e.g. numbers/types of people actively involved

- *Participation in local community and / or council decision making on energy / climate / resilience issues* - e.g. involvement in public forums/consultations/petition/lobbying

- *Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time* - e.g. 3 years or more

- *Other (please specify)*

Reflections

Between a third and a half of the respondents answered these questions. It is clear that some groups are already monitoring these issues, but the extent to which they are doing so is not clear at present. Current research is investigating this in more detail[6].

'Participation in activities' was the most popular issue selected for organisations who are *already* conducting some kind of M&E, and for those who would *like* to M&E. This is unsurprising, as it can be one of the most straightforward indicators to monitor; however, many community organisations are not currently monitoring these activities. 'Community engagement / inclusion' and 'organisational capacity and sustainability' were also popular choices for those already involved in some degree of M&E. What the results clearly show is that in most areas, M&E is not taking place, although there is a desire to do so by the community organisations.

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[6] Monitoring and evaluation for Sustainable Communities, 7 month project, Jan – July 2013. Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford. See http://www.transitionresearchnetwork.org/monitoring-and-evaluation-for-sustainable-communities.html

The spread between the UK and the rest of the world is interesting to observe. This was most evenly spread in the participation in the group's activities. With the exception of a couple of groups, the least monitored area is that of sustained changes and impacts of the issues over time. Current research is investigating the degree of current M&E, and the methods used.

2.5.2 Organisational influence (Q9 and Q16 combined)

These questions took the same format as Qs 8 and 15 and achieved a similar spread of answers, with most respondents to the questions indicating that they do not currently conduct any M&E but would like to. The results are shown in Figure 8.

Of the issues, the most popular were:

1) *behaviours* (e.g. changes in household energy behaviour);

2) *hearts and minds* (values, beliefs, attitudes , motivations);

3) *local resources* (availability and cost of local food, energy water etc) ;

4) *social impacts* (e.g. friendships ,support networks, sense of belonging, sense of community pride etc), and

5) *sustained changes and impacts over time.*

Of those top three issues, some M&E activity exists, both in the UK and the rest of the world, particularly in the category of individual or household behaviours. This is not surprising, as for many community organisations, changing and influencing household energy behaviours in their community is a focal point of their work.
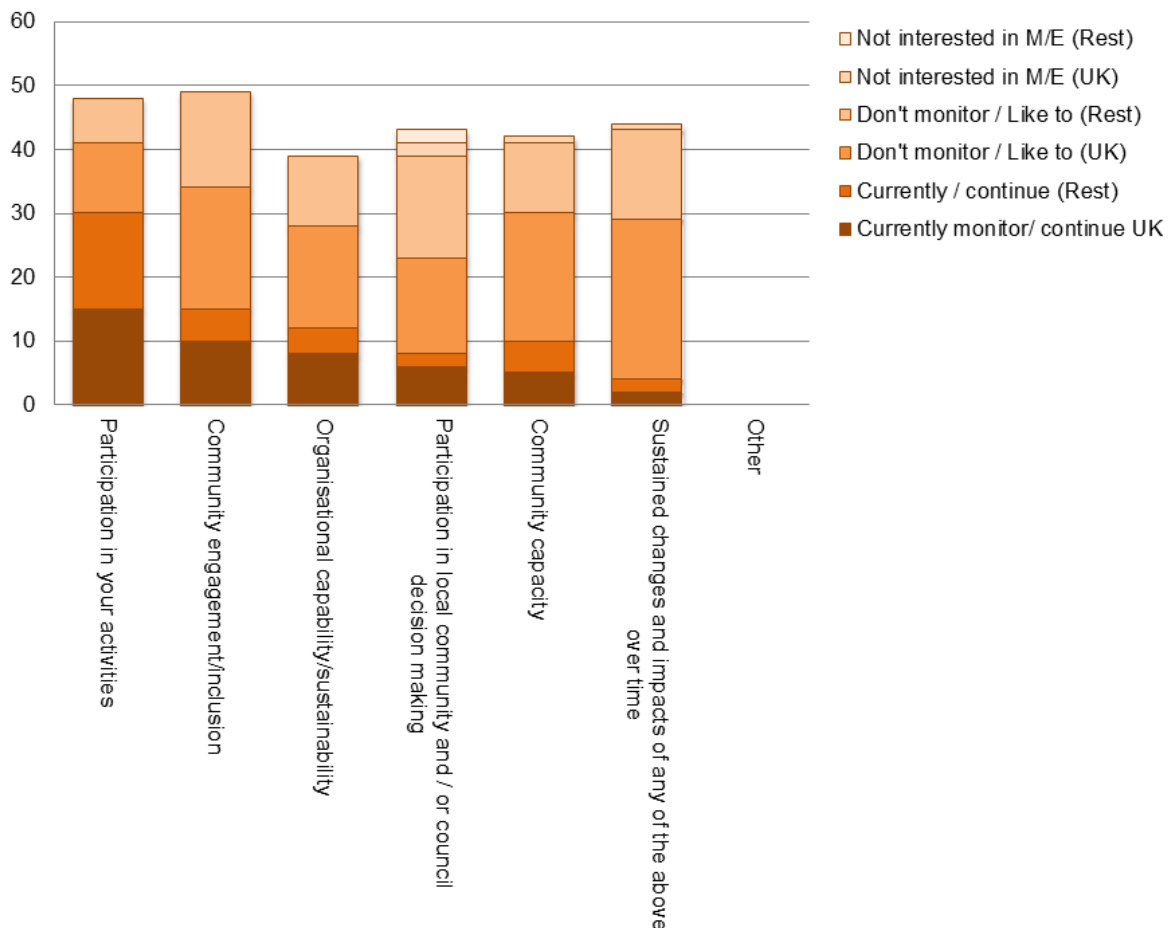

Figure 7. Organisational capacity and participation issues and indicators (responses to Q8. and Q15. combined).

Your organisation's influence (n50)

Legend:
- Currently M&E, won't continue (all)
- Not interested in M&E (Rest)
- Not interested in M&E (UK)
- Don't M&E, Like to (Rest)
- Don't M&E, Like to (UK)
- Currently M&E, WILL continue (Rest)
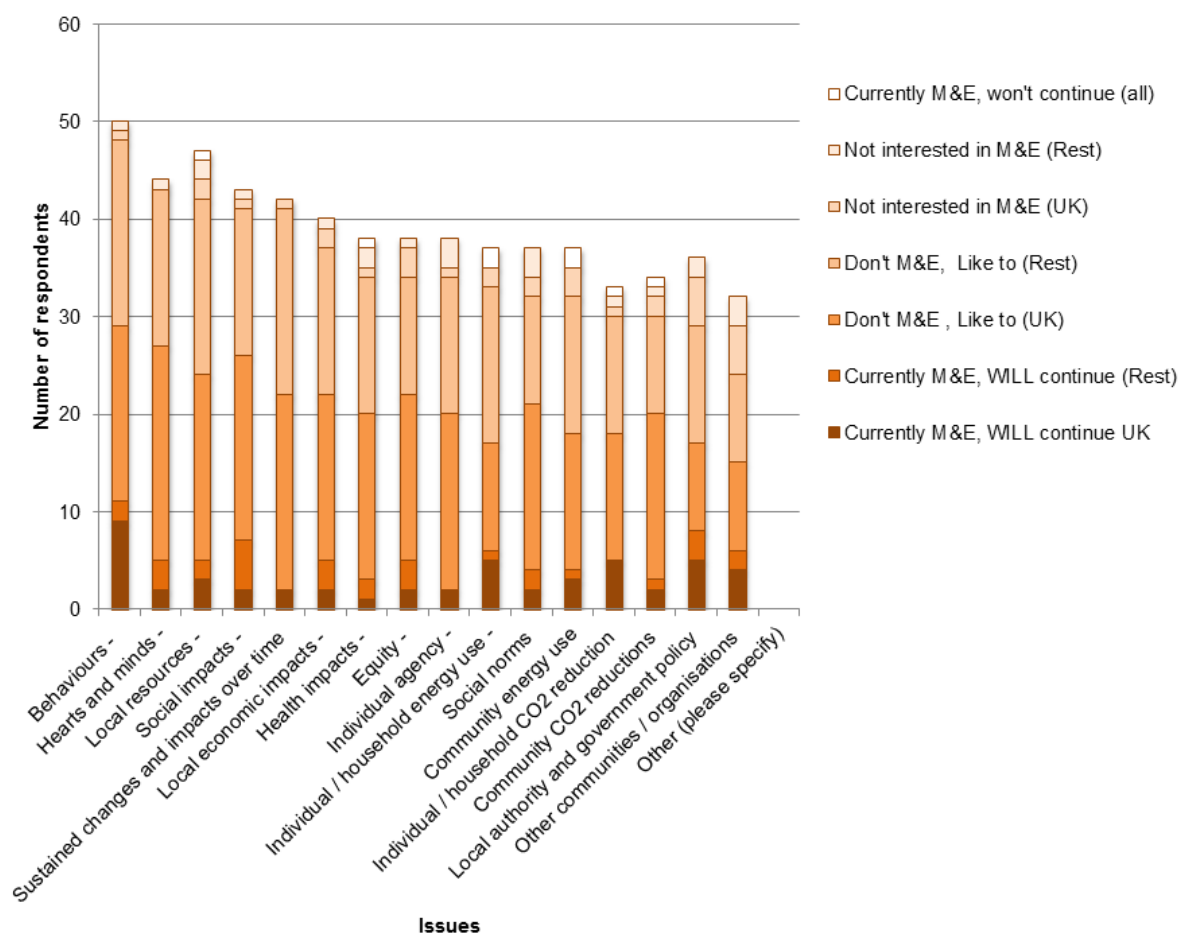- Currently M&E, WILL continue UK

Figure 8. Responses to Q9. Which issues / indicators about your organisation's influence do you currently monitor and/or evaluate, and which you would like to monitor and/or evaluate?

Full definitions for the columns:

- *Behaviours* - e.g. changes in household energy behaviours, food, transport, waste, lifestyles

- *Hearts and minds* - e.g. values, beliefs, attitudes, motivations

- *Local resources* - e.g. availability and cost of local food, water, energy etc

- *Social impacts* - e.g. friendships, support networks, sense of belonging, sense of community pride, etc

- *Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time* - e.g. 3 years or more

- *Local economic impacts* - e.g. income; access to food, energy, water; access to other basic goods and services; skills; jobs

- *Health impacts* - e.g. warmer and healthier homes, public spaces, healthier lifestyles

- *Equity* - e.g. who is benefiting/who is bearing the cost of your initiatives

- *Social norms* - e.g. what is considered normal / common practice locally

- *Individual agency* - i.e. a person's belief that they can make a meaningful difference

- *Individual / household energy use*

- *Community energy use*

- *Individual / household CO2 reduction*

- *Community CO2 reductions*

- *Local authority and government policy*

- *Other communities / organisations*

- *Other (please specify)*

It appears that the least amount of existing M&E occurs for 'sustained changes and impacts over

time',' individual agency', 'health impacts' and 'community CO2 reductions'. These are important but difficult areas for groups to assess because of long time frames, the range of factors influencing impacts and difficulties of attributions. A longer term approach to M&E could help identify trends over time, and areas of best practice in M&E, but a balance would need to be struck between the level and detail of M&E that a community organisation can carry out.

The results from Figure 8 also illustrate anecdotal evidence from organisations that achieving an accurate appraisal of community CO2 reductions can be difficult if systematic data collection about household CO2 reductions is not established. In order to asses community level CO2 reductions, a sufficient sample of the community need to be presented, which is often beyond the means of most groups. It also raises the question of who should be collecting this type of community wide data. Further research is on-going to investigate the datasets and statistical sources (such as Local Authority datasets compile for the now defunct National Indicators) being used by both community organisations, Local Authorities and other actors, and their applicability and usefulness to a community scale. In the UK some of this wider data is collected by DECC on a wider scale (for example for the evaluation of the Low Carbon Communities Challenge[7], but this level of data collection is usually beyond the time or capacity of a community organisation. Additionally, it can be difficult to detect localised changes across a variety of indicators across a larger scale, and to assess the attribution.

The least popular options were assessing the influences on local authority / government policy, and influences on other groups. It would be interesting to investigate this area further however, to capture the full range of impacts and influences achieved by groups at a local level through their involvement in local partnerships, policy frameworks and national advisory bodies, and their influence on other groups through their involvement in local and national networks.

Some respondents mentioned that they currently monitor some areas of work (light blue) but won't continue. It was beyond the scope of this survey to find out how they did this, and their experiences. Current research is exploring the experiences and

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[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/48458/5788-low-carbon-communities-challenge-evaluation-report.pdf

methods of those organisations who indicated that they are currently M&E part of their work.

2.5.3 Data collection methods

Question 10 aimed to give an indication of the range of data collection methods. Figure 9 shows the responses collected. The category 'Your own records / databases' is a broad category, but indicates that a level of monitoring is being undertaken. The most popular choices could be categorised as more informal forms of M&E, This includes anecdotal evidence and informal feedback and monitoring, such as reflections from participants at events, observations of trends and conversations. It also includes workshops or meetings for reflection or evaluation can involve reflection either as part of planning meetings, or longer annual evaluation / feedback meetings. More formal methods, such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews and use of statistics were less common.

Full definitions for the columns in Q 10:

- *Your own records / databases*

- *Anecdotal evidence*

- *Semi-structured interviews*

- *Questionnaires*

- *Surveys of people who are actively involved*

- *Surveys of people within the local community, wider than those actively involved*

- *Surveys of other stakeholders*

- *Workshops/meetings for reflection or evaluation*

- *Household energy meter readings (electricity / gas / other fuels)*

- *Individual/household carbon calculators*

- *Community carbon calculators*

- *Government Statistics (e.g. CO2 per capita)*

- *Spatial Tools (e.g. Google Earth and OS maps)*

- *Social media*

- *Other tools for on-line reporting / data collection (please note in next question)*

- *Other statistics / databases (please note in next question)*

- *Other (please specify)*

Q10. What data sources, tools, and / or processes do you use to collect the data? (n31)
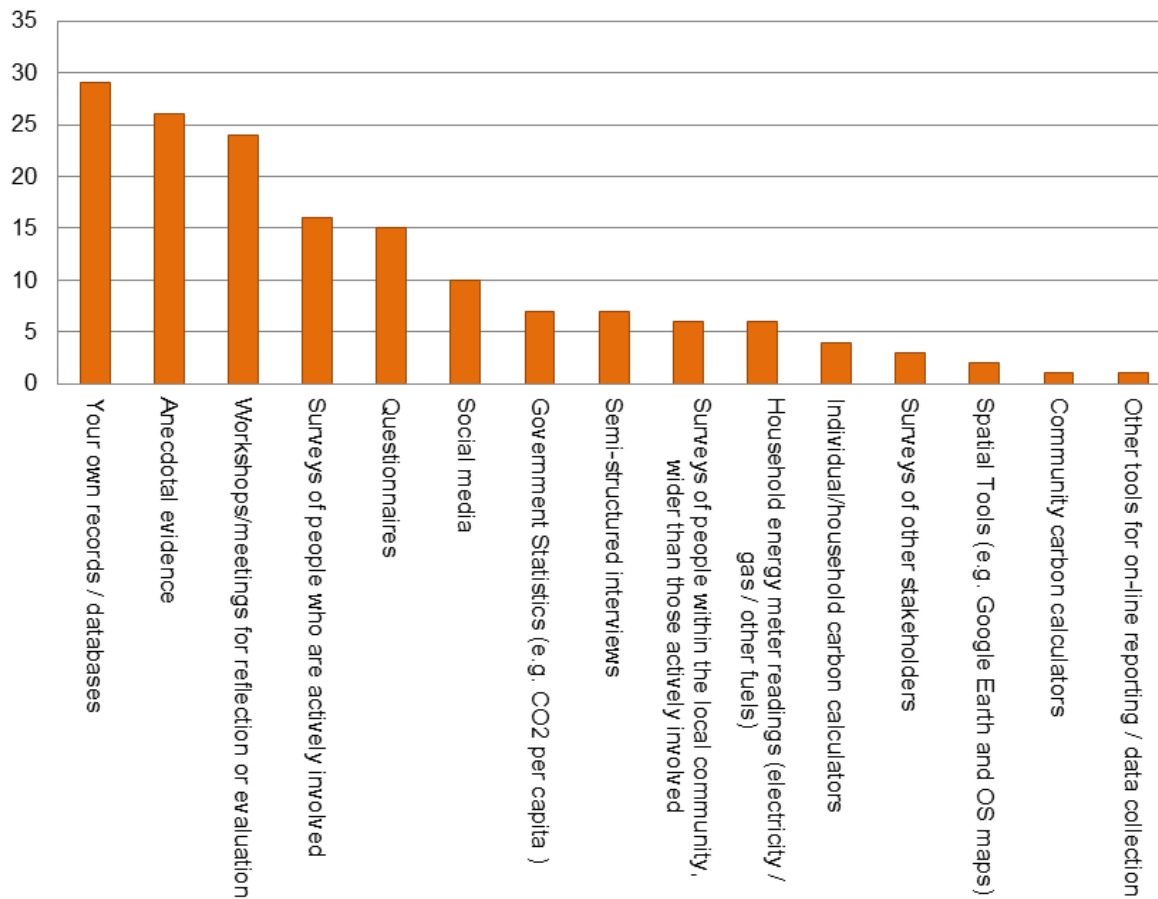

Figure 9. Responses to Q10 What data sources, tools, and/or processes do you use to collect data?

2.5.4 What tools are being used for M&E?

We wanted to find out about the tools used in more detail. Q 11 asked 'If you are using existing monitoring / evaluation tools (for example Act on CO2), please briefly indicate which ones you are using, and comment on them (e.g. their usefulness, what is good / not so good about them). If they are web based, please give a web link if possible'. Nine responses were received in total.

Online tools such as google docs and survey monkey were used to gather data, alongside one organisation which planned to use energyshare[8] to log energy generation. One respondent mentioned that they *'promoted the Energy Saving Trust's community carbon footprinting tool[9] but too few people took up the challenge to record on the EST website to get a community picture'.* This is important to note, as it indicates that some tools for wider community monitoring may require a level of data collection that exceeds the capacity of many groups.

Specific feedback sheets and questionnaires were used after events such as Open Homes / open gardens, and for borrowing energy monitors, and one group had developed their own survey.

Other methods included 'small group discussions and post-it notes at community consultation events', and Walkit[10] tool for calculating carbon emissions saved by walking.

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[8] http://www.energyshare.com/

[9]
http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Publications2/Communities/How-to-get-the-most-out-of-community-carbon-footprinting

[10] http://walkit.com/

2.6 The support and resources needed to help monitor and evaluate organisation's work

We wanted to find out what resources would help community organisations with their M&E, as this will inform the development of EVALOC resources, and future development of M&E resources. Questions 12 and 17 asked 'What kind of support or resources would help you to monitor / evaluate your organisation? Please rank in order of priority'. Respondents were asked to select the types of tools, resources and methods from a list, and indicate the level of priority (High, Medium or Low) they wold give to this. The results are presented in Figure 10.

Again, just under half of the survey respondents replied to these questions overall. However for those who did respond there wasn't a clear 'favourite' resource, with many respondents selecting most of the support and resources in the list. Figure 10 illustrates the results, showing the spread between priorities.

The three highest priorities for respondents were Interactive Web tools, guides to help you decide your M&E approach, and sample questionnaires. Overall however the results demonstrate a medium / high priority for a variety of approaches to M&E, and suggest the development of a menu of approaches form which organisations can select the most suitable for them. This is another area for future research to explore in more detail.

Full definitions for the columns in Q12 and 17:

* *12a Guides to help you decide what and how to monitor / evaluate*

* *12b Workshops with key stakeholders to design your own monitoring & evaluation system*

* *12cSample questionnaires*

* *12d Interactive web tools (e.g. online tools which generate reports from data you have input to specified fields)*

* *12e Spatial mapping tools to identify targeted areas or to monitor progress*

* *12f Household carbon calculators (e.g. written / automated / web based tools which work out your carbon emissions from actual or estimated energy usage)*

* *12g Mentoring with someone skilled in your chosen approach*

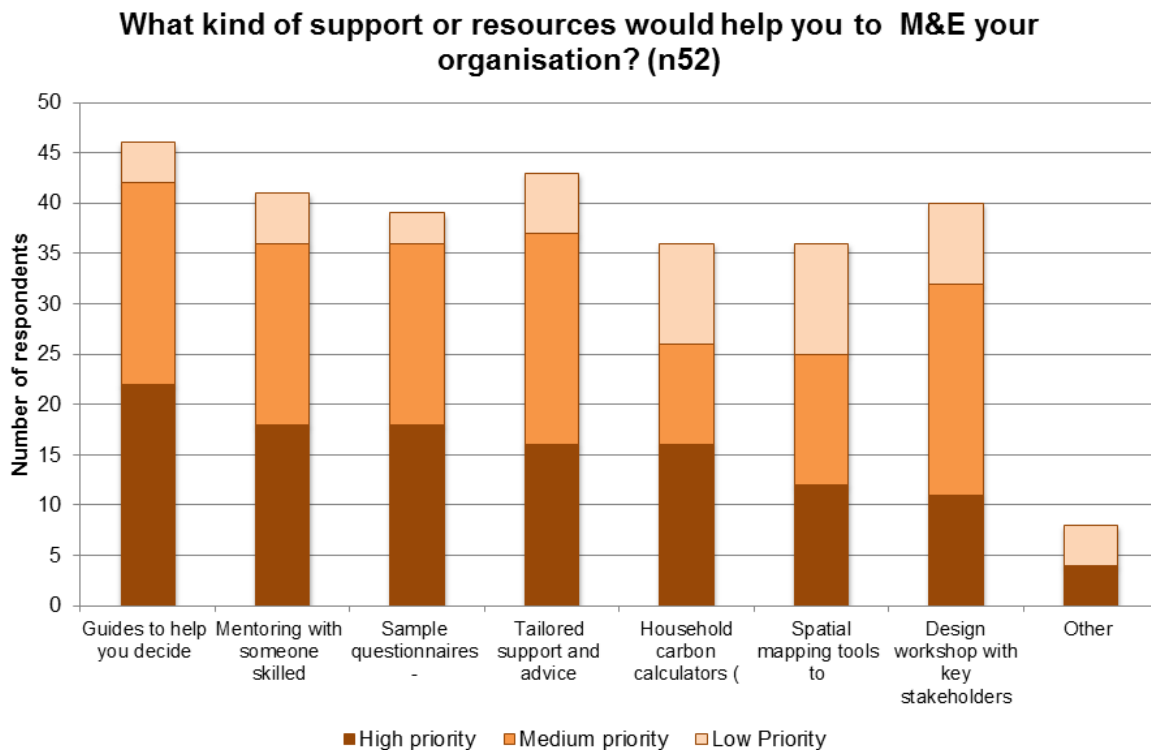* *12h Tailored support and advice from monitoring / evaluation experts*

Figure 10. Responses to Q12. And Q17. Prioritising the type of support or resources required to help M&E in community organisations.

2.7 The advantages that monitoring and evaluation could bring to organisations

Questions 13 & 18 *asked 'What advantages would your ideal monitoring and evaluation system bring to your organisation?'*. This question was an open question, and was asked to both those who are already carrying out some M&E, and those who aren't.

46 respondents answered the question in total. The answers were coded into themes, with each respondent mentioning between 1-3 different themes in their answers. What all the respondents had in common was a very local focus, both on their organisation's impact, learning about what projects and methods were working, and obtaining information to demonstrate their impact to partners, their local authority, and actual or potential funders. Using M & E to engage with the wider community was also highlighted as important, This included discovering what the priorities of their local community were, and as a way to demonstrate the achievements of organisation to their wider local community.

Emerging themes in more detail:

- **Discover and demonstrate impact:** these responses were concerned with the impact that the different activities of the group were having. This theme was typified by the quote *'such a system should at least help us distinguish successful activities from unsuccessful ones, i.e. things we are doing that are actually making a difference in developing resilience, and also how to do those things more effectively in the future'*.

- **Informing group process / strategy :** these responses were concerned with using M&E to inform the strategy and process of their group, typified by the response: *'[it would] help us to know where we are and evaluate if we're getting to where we want to be.'*

24 out of the 46 respondents mentioned one or both of the most popular themes of learning about their effectiveness / impact, and using this information to inform their strategy. The implications of this are that ideal M&E resources should provide immediate results for the organisations, to enable organisational learning and development.
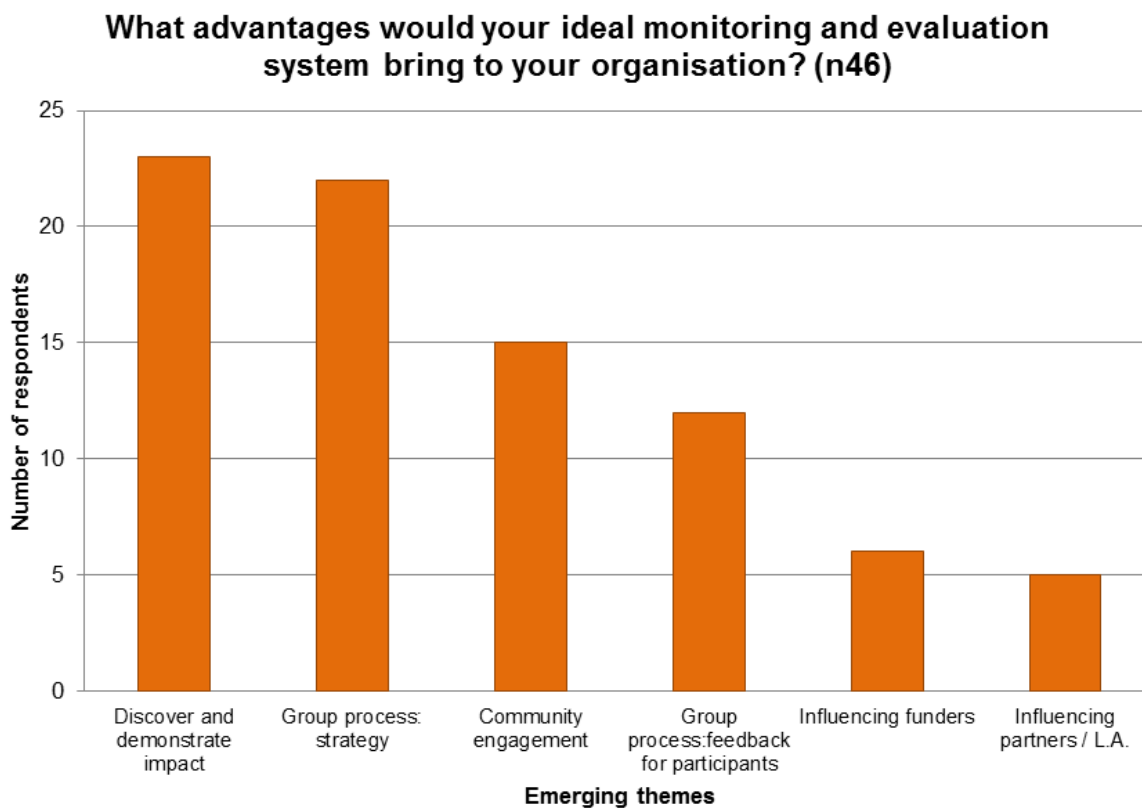

What advantages would your ideal monitoring and evaluation system bring to your organisation? (n46)

Figure 11. Responses to Q13. And Q18. 'What advantages would an ideal monitoring and evaluation system bring to your organisation?

- **Community engagement:** Respondents also wanted to use M & E to find out the concerns of the local community, and to demonstrate what can be achieved by the group in the wider community. This suggests that M&E process and results could be used as both outreach and communication tools. This theme is typified by the comments *'being able to measure the impact our Transition work would help grow momentum within our initiative. It would also enable us to engage with the community and promote and support their interests, working on projects that are important to those in our community';* and *'helping community members visualise the connections and assets within the community, and links to other communities that results in increased engagement.'*

- **Group process/ feedback for participants:** Respondents also indicated that they would like to use the information gained by M&E to enable feedback to the group / team members / volunteers, typified by the comments *'greater sense of achievement in the team'; 'ability to praise volunteer's efforts with statistics of achievement',* and mentions of *'motivation'* and *'assertiveness'.* Whilst there are overlaps with the theme of informing group strategy here, it is important to note how valuable this feedback is for the group's motivation and energy as a whole, their ability to demonstrate their efficacy and more clearly articulate answers to the question *'how is Transition going?'* .

- **Influencing Funders:** Respondents brought out the importance of using M& E to establish and demonstrate credibility, and being able to influence potential funders, typified by the comments *'better able to secure funding'* and *'[a M&E system] would offer us a firm evidence to use when applying for funding'.*

- **Influencing partners / local authority:** Respondents would also like M & E to demonstrate to and on partner organisations, or their Local Authority. This could be used both to forge partnerships, to demonstrate their efficacy, and potentially to hold Las to account. This theme is typified by the comments *'help us achieve credibility with the City Government'* and *'encourage LAs to support us'.*

2.8 Obstacles to monitoring and evaluation

This question (Q 14) was asked to the respondents who don't currently M&/or E any part of their work, and received 20 responses. The specific wording was: *'If you don't currently monitor or evaluate any of your work, what gets in the way of collecting the data?'.* It was an open question.

The answers were analysed thematically, and are presented in Figure 12. From the answers received, it is clear that lack of resources and/or time are significant issues. The other significant issue was that respondents felt it was too early in the group process. As so few responses were received for this question it is hard to draw wider conclusions, but these responses are not surprising. Responses received which were put into the 'other' category included that some groups already have informal processes within meetings, so don't collect data as such; that it isn't a priority for the group; and that the group is between projects.

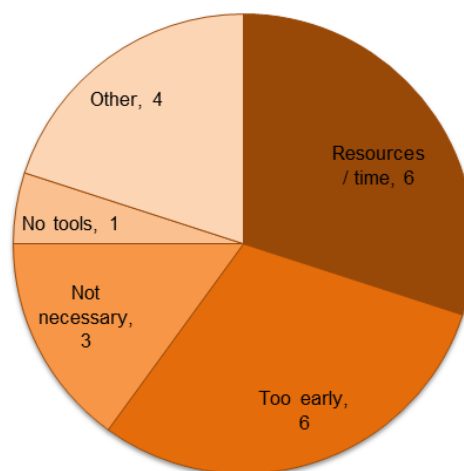**What gets in the way of collecting the data for monitoring or evaluating? (n20)**

Other, 4
Resources / time, 6
No tools, 1
Not necessary, 3
Too early, 6

Figure 12. Responses to Q14. What gets in the way of collecting data for monitoring and evaluating?

Chapter 3
Developing the M&E capacity of community organisations

Whilst the invitation to complete the survey was issued to both the Low Carbon Communities Network and the Transition Network, the results of this survey predominantly reflects the groups in the Transition Network, as they made up the 87% of the responses.

M&E resources which can be used to show sustained changes over time of both organisational capacity and participation, and of the organisation's influence, was identified as a key issue for monitoring and evaluation. This applies to all the issues / indicators discussed in section 2.3.

The results of the survey show that there is already a wealth of experience of M&E to investigate, and a willingness to conduct more. However, the challenge is to develop the resources that will enable the community organisations to do so, whilst not burdening them with a greater workload. Designed well, M&E can be a process which enables greater reflection and learning within and between community organisations and the wider network. Capacity to implement M&E does not all have to come from within (already overstretched) community organisations though. The emergence of the Transition Research Network and the Transition Research marketplace could help catalyse the capacity needed to enable a deeper and longer term M&E of the community organisation sector.

Some areas have been highlighted as potential focus points for M&E, which are:

Organisation's capacity and participation:

1) *Community capacity* - e.g. social networks; human, technical, and financial resources; skills, community organisations; partnerships/collaborations

2) *Community engagement/inclusion in your activities* - e.g. numbers/types of people your project aims to reach

Organisation's influence:

1) *Behaviours* – e.g changes in household energy behaviour;

2) *Hearts and minds* - e.g. values, beliefs, attitudes , motivations;

3) *Local resources* – e.g. availability and cost of local food, energy water etc.

However, it is important to note that whilst we have highlighted some of the more popular issues, given the small sample size, we should not interpret that these are the only issues to focus on. Moreover, there was not a stark difference between the most and least popular M&E issues from the list given. Depending on what the M&E is to be used for, indicators and issues concerning individual and community energy and CO2 reduction may be of most importance in demonstrating the aggregated value and efficacy of community approaches. However, if it is not a priority of the groups themselves, then consideration needs to be given to resourcing the systematic collection of this data.

Support and resources
The responses seem to show that a range of resources and ways of involving groups in M&E would be useful. Tools such as guides to help groups decide their approach, and interactive web tools were identified as high priority, which can be used 'off the shelf'. Some of these are already available online, but perhaps more awareness is needed about their online location, application and description. Existing resources could be appraised to see which could be developed to function as more sophisticated online web resources. In addition, more detailed interactive workshops and mentoring was also identified as a high / medium priority.

Ongoing collection and review of the M&E tools already underway by the Transition Research Network is invaluable here.

Developing and trialling monitoring and evaluation tools and resources
34 respondents, 20 of whom are in the UK, said that they would be interested in being involved in the development and trial of self-evaluation methods for Transition initiatives and Low Carbon communities. The experiences and views of these UK respondents are a potentially rich resource of knowledge and experience, and are being investigated as part of the HEIF funded research.

Overall reflections
Time and resource to do the monitoring and evaluation systematically were cited as barriers for groups who aren't currently doing M&E, but similar barriers will most likely exist for those who are involved in some level of M&E. The stated need but lack of resources, and priority given, to M&E seems to support the idea for approaches which partner those who do have time / resources (such as some researchers) with groups who would like to M&E but lack some of the resources.

Organisations are essentially action focused, thus M&E resources need to have a dual function: they need to help the organisation reflect on their effectiveness and guide future development of strategy, activities and focus, and provide useful data to assess the aggregate impact and influence of the organisations at county or national scale.

Next steps

This survey has been useful in providing a snapshot of the existing level of M&E within organisations who responded, and has helped provide evidence of demand for the development of M&E resources.

Ongoing research conducted as part of the Knowledge Exchange project 'Monitoring and Evaluation for Sustainable Communities' (http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/research/technologies/projects/monitoringandevaluation/) is investigating the responses in more detail. This research will be fed back to the EVALOC research project, Transition Network, and the Transition Research Network and Low carbon Communities Network.

Appendices

Appendix A: Full survey questions

1. Please tell us which organisation you're responding about

Name of your organisation: _____

Village / Town / City / Area: _____

Country: _____

2. Please tick all that apply to your organisation:
- ☐ Transition Initiative
- ☐ Low Carbon Community group
- ☐ A distinct project within an existing Transition Initiative / Low Carbon community group
- ☐ Community Energy Project
- ☐ Local Authority
- ☐ Partnership of organisations / agencies

3. Does your organisation monitor / evaluate any part of your work?

Yes / No

→ Those who answered **YES** to Q3 were directed to answer Questions 4 – 13, 19, 20
Those who answered **NO** to Q3 were directed to answer Questions 14-18, 19, 20

4. Did your organisation initiate the monitoring / evaluation?
Yes / No/ A mixture

5. Please tick which organisations are involved in the following aspects of your monitoring / evaluation

	Your organisation	Funder	University researcher / student project	Partner organisations	Consultants	Other
Design of monitoring / evaluation						
Implementation of monitoring / evaluation						
Analysis of data						
Use of data						

6. What is the purpose of your monitoring / evaluation? Please tick all that are applicable.
- ☐ To strengthen organisation / movement e.g. by improving understanding of how change
- ☐ happens, project design/implementation, effectiveness and impact
- ☐ To provide evidence to engage / motivate the wider community
- ☐ To provide evidence to influence local / national policy
- ☐ To be accountable to your community or other stakeholders
- ☐ To satisfy grant / funding conditions

7. What are the key questions / lines of investigation you are seeking to address? Please tick all that are applicable.

- ☐ Relevance - e.g. how relevant is your organisation to people you want to involve?
- ☐ Effectiveness - e.g. are you achieving your objectives / targets?
- ☐ Impacts / equity - e.g. does your organisation improve people's well being ? Who benefits and who bears the cost?
- ☐ Cost effectiveness / efficiency - e.g. are you achieving your objectives / targets in a cost effective / efficient way?
- ☐ Ways of working - e.g. are your internal organisational processes working well?
- ☐ Collaboration with other organisations / sectors - e.g. how well is the collaboration working?
- ☐ Project design / proof of concept - e.g. what is working well/ what isn't, what do you need to change?
- ☐ Other (please specify)

8. Please tick which organisational capacity and participation issues / indicators you currently monitor / evaluate, and which you would like to monitor / evaluate.

	We currently monitor/evaluate this and will continue	We currently monitor/evaluate this but will not continue	We don't currently monitor/evaluate this but would like to	We're not interesting in Monitoring / evaluating this
Organisational capability/sustainability - e.g. volunteers, money, skills, understanding etc				
Community capacity - e.g. social networks; human, technical, and financial resources; skills, community organisations; partnerships/ collaborations				
Community engagement/inclusion in your activities - e.g. numbers/types of people your project aims to reach				
Participation in your activities - e.g. numbers/types of people actively involved				
Participation in local community and / or council decision making on energy / climate / resilience issues - e.g. involvement in public forums/consultations/petition/lobbying				
Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time (e.g. 3 years or more)				
Other (please specify)				

9. Please tick which of the following issues / indicators about your organisation's influence you currently monitor / evaluate, and which you would like to monitor / evaluate.

	We currently Monitor / evaluate this and will continue	We currently Monitor / evaluate this but will not continue	We don't currently monitor / evaluate this but would like to	We're not interesting in monitoring / evaluating this
Behaviours - e.g. changes in household energy behaviours, food, transport, waste, lifestyles				
Hearts and minds - e.g. values, beliefs, attitudes, motivations				
Local resources - e.g. availability and cost of local food, water, energy etc				
Social impacts - e.g. friendships, support networks, sense of belonging, sense of community pride, etc				
Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time (e.g. 3 years or more)				
Local economic impacts - e.g. income; access to food, energy, water; access to other basic goods and services; skills; jobs				
Health impacts - e.g. warmer and healthier homes, public spaces, healthier lifestyles				
Equity - e.g. who is benefiting/who is bearing the cost of your initiatives				
Social norms - e.g. what is considered normal / common practice locally				
Individual agency - i.e. a person's belief that they can make a meaningful difference				
Individual / household energy use				
Community energy use				
Individual / household CO2 reduction				
Community CO2 reductions				
Local authority and government policy				
Other communities / organisations				
Other (please specify)				

10. What data sources, tools, and / or processes do you use to collect the data? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Your own records / databases
- ☐ Anecdotal evidence
- ☐ Semi-structured interviews
- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☐ Surveys of people who are actively involved
- ☐ Surveys of people within the local community, wider than those actively involved
- ☐ Surveys of other stakeholders
- ☐ Workshops/meetings for reflection or evaluation
- ☐ Household energy meter readings (electricity / gas / other fuels)
- ☐ Individual/household carbon calculators
- ☐ Community carbon calculators
- ☐ Government Statistics (e.g. CO2 per capita)
- ☐ Spatial Tools (e.g. Google Earth and OS maps)
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Other tools for on-line reporting / data collection (please note in next question)
- ☐ Other statistics / databases (please note in next question)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

11. If you are using existing monitoring / evaluation tools (for example Act on CO2), please briefly indicate which ones you are using, and comment on them (e.g. their usefulness, what is good / not so good about them). If they are web based, please give a web link if possible. [Open question]

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12. What kind of support or resources would help you to monitor / evaluate your organisation? Please rank in order of priority (High, Medium or Low priority)

- ☐ 12a Guides to help you decide what and how to monitor / evaluate
- ☐ 12b Workshops with key stakeholders to design your own monitoring & evaluation system
- ☐ 12cSample questionnaires
- ☐ 12d Interactive web tools (e.g. online tools which generate reports from data you have input to specified fields)
- ☐ 12e Spatial mapping tools to identify targeted areas or to monitor progress
- ☐ 12f Household carbon calculators (e.g. written / automated / web based tools which work out your carbon emissions from actual or estimated energy usage)
- ☐ 12g Mentoring with someone skilled in your chosen approac
- ☐ 12h Tailored support and advice from monitoring / evaluation experts

13. What advantages would your ideal monitoring and evaluation system bring to your organisation?
[Open question]

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For those who answered NO to Q 3:

14. If you don't currently monitor or evaluate any of your work, what gets in the way of collecting the data?
[Open question]

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15. Please tick which organisational capacity and participation issues / indicators you would like to monitor / evaluate.
- ☐ Organisational capability/sustainability - e.g. volunteers, money, skills, understanding etc
- ☐ Community capacity - e.g. social networks; human, technical, and financial resources; skills, community organisations; partnerships/collaborations
- ☐ Community engagement/inclusion in your activities - e.g. numbers/types of people your project aims to reach
- ☐ Participation in your activities - e.g. numbers/types of people actively involved
- ☐ Participation in local community and / or council decision making on energy / climate / resilience issues - e.g. involvement in public forums/consultations/petition/lobbying
- ☐ Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time (e.g. 3 years or more)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

16. Please tick which of the following issues / indicators about your organisation's influence you would like to monitor / evaluate.

- ☐ Behaviours - e.g. changes in household energy behaviours, food, transport, waste, lifestyles
- ☐ Hearts and minds - e.g. values, beliefs, attitudes, motivations
- ☐ Local resources - e.g. availability and cost of local food, water, energy etc
- ☐ Social impacts - e.g. friendships, support networks, sense of belonging, sense of community pride, etc
- ☐ Sustained changes and impacts of any of the above over time (e.g. 3 years or more)
- ☐ Local economic impacts - e.g. income; access to food, energy, water; access to other basic goods and services; skills; jobs
- ☐ Health impacts - e.g. warmer and healthier homes, public spaces, healthier lifestyles
- ☐ Equity - e.g. who is benefiting/who is bearing the cost of your initiatives
- ☐ Social norms - e.g. what is considered normal / common practice locally
- ☐ Individual agency - i.e. a person's belief that they can make a meaningful difference
- ☐ Individual / household energy use
- ☐ Community energy use
- ☐ Individual / household CO2 reduction
- ☐ Community CO2 reductions
- ☐ Local authority and government policy
- ☐ Other communities / organisations
- ☐ Other (please specify)

17. What kind of support or resources would help you to monitor / evaluate your organisation? Please rank in order of priority for you (High, Medium, Low Priority)

- ☐ Guides to help you decide what and how to monitor / evaluate
- ☐ Workshops with key stakeholders to design your own monitoring & evaluation system
- ☐ Sample questionnaires
- ☐ Interactive web tools (e.g. online tools which generate reports from data you have input to specified fields)
- ☐ Spatial mapping tools to identify targeted areas or to monitor progress
- ☐ Household carbon calculators (e.g. written / automated / web based tools which work out your carbon emissions from actual or estimated energy usage)
- ☐ Mentoring with someone skilled in your chosen approac
- ☐ Tailored support and advice from monitoring / evaluation experts

18. What advantages would your ideal monitoring and evaluation system bring to your organisation? [Open question]

ALL:

19. Are you interested in being involved in the development and trial of self-evaluation methods for Transition initiatives and Low Carbon communities? If so, please enter your email address below:

20. If you have any further comments or reflections about monitoring and evaluation, please enter them below. [Open question]