HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Project Management and AI: PMP, PRINCE2, Agile and PMD Pro applied to humanitarian work

Course handout · Week 9 : Steering with MEAL: indicators, monitoring, dashboards and AI

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to manage humanitarian projects with the main methodologies and artificial intelligence: project cycle, PMBOK and PMP, PRINCE2, Agile (Scrum, Kanban) and hybrid approaches, Project DPro (PMD Pro), logical framework, theory of change and results-based management, planning and critical path, donor budget and earned value, risks and stakeholders, MEAL, donor reporting, change management, leadership and closure. At every step, AI (Claude, Gemini, Copilot and project management tools) is used methodically, protecting the data of the people we serve. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent preparation programme: it does not award the PMP, PRINCE2 or PMD Pro certifications, which are obtained through the official exams.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-gestion-projet-ia/semaine-9/

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Week 9 : Steering with MEAL: indicators, monitoring, dashboards and AI

Objectives

- Build a MEAL plan linked to the logframe: SMART indicators, baselines, targets, disaggregation, sources and frequencies.
- Track progress with an indicator tracking table (ITT) and a dashboard, and turn them into decisions.
- Use AI to analyse quantitative and qualitative data while respecting humanitarian data responsibility.

The MEAL plan, backbone of project steering

MEAL stands for Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning. The **MEAL plan** turns the logframe into a concrete system. For each indicator: precise definition, calculation method, baseline, target (total and per period), disaggregation (sex, age, disability, location), source and collection method, frequency, owner, intended use.

A **SMART** indicator is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. "Improve access to water" is not an indicator; "% of target households with at least 15 litres of drinking water per person per day (Sphere standard), by December 2027" is.

The MEAL plan also covers **evaluations** (baseline, mid-term, final), the **feedback and complaints mechanism** and **learning** moments (quarterly reviews, lessons-learned workshops). The PM4NGOs **MEAL DPro** guide is a free reference.

The indicator tracking table (ITT)

The **ITT** (Indicator Tracking Table) shows, for each indicator, the baseline, target, achievements by period, cumulative total and achievement rate. Donors often require it with each report.

Reading an ITT means comparing the **achievement rate** with **elapsed time**. In quarter 3 of 4 (75% of the time), an indicator at 45% calls for analysis: a late start that can be caught up, an access problem, an unrealistic target, or a poorly defined indicator?

Watch out for frequent mistakes: adding up people counted several times (one family receives three distributions: that is 3 distributions, but a single family); mixing people and households; presenting a percentage without the denominator; forgetting disaggregation by sex, age and disability.

From monitoring to decisions

Monitoring is useless if it does not change decisions. An effective one-hour **monthly performance review** examines, in order:

1. **outcome indicators** and community feedback: is change happening?

2. **outputs** and the schedule: are we on time?
3. the **budget** and earned value;
4. **risks and issues**;
5. **decisions**: who does what, by when.

The one-page **dashboard** combines these elements with colour codes (green, amber, red) defined in advance. For example: green if achievement is at least 90% of the time-based pro rata, amber from 70 to 89%, red below. Written thresholds avoid subjective debates.

Analysing data with AI

Quantitative data. AI can write spreadsheet formulas, clean a database (duplicates, outliers), calculate rates and disaggregations, propose charts and a first commentary. It can also run small calculations in versions with an analysis tool. Always check totals with an independent calculation.

Qualitative data. For hundreds of open answers, focus group notes or community feedback, AI can propose themes, count occurrences and extract representative quotes. Good practice: define the coding frame yourself or validate it; manually check a sample (for example 10% of answers); keep minority voices, which automated summaries tend to erase.

What AI must not do: process sensitive complaints (sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, fraud) outside the planned confidential channel; decide alone on a complaint's category; produce figures without a verifiable database.

Humanitarian data responsibility

The **IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility** (2023) and the **ICRC Handbook on Data Protection** set the framework. Before entering data into an AI tool:

- **Minimise**: only the columns needed;
- **Truly anonymise**: remove names, phone numbers, registration numbers, precise GPS coordinates, and check that combinations (village + age + disability + household composition) do not make anyone identifiable;
- Think about **demographically sensitive data**: even without names, the location of an ethnic group or of displaced people can expose them;
- Use the **approved offer** of your organisation, whose terms exclude the use of your data for training;
- Respect the **consent** given at collection.

> Simple rule: if a leak of this file could harm a person or a group, it does not go into a non-approved AI tool, even "just for a summary".

Learning and adapting

The "L" in MEAL is often forgotten. For a project to learn:

- keep an **adaptive decision log**: date, finding, data, decision, approval;
- hold short **after-action reviews** after each major stage (what was planned? what happened? why? what to repeat or change?);
- share lessons with the cluster and partners;
- check the **assumptions** of the theory of change at least once every six months.

AI can help synthesise reviews and find lessons from past projects in your archived reports, provided it cites the source documents.

Exercise: reading an ITT and deciding

Situation. Child protection project of the fictitious NGO Amal, 12 months. Indicator: "number of children receiving individual case management". Annual target: 2,400 children. Achievements: Q1 450; Q2 620; Q3 530. Cumulative disaggregation: 58% boys, 42% girls, whereas the target population is 51% girls. Dashboard thresholds: green ≥ 90% of the time-based pro rata, amber 70 to 89%, red < 70%.

Task. 1) Cumulative total and achievement rate at the end of Q3? 2) Dashboard colour? 3) How many children in Q4 to reach the target? 4) What question does the disaggregation raise?

Answer. 1) 450 + 620 + 530 = 1,600 children; 1,600 ÷ 2,400 ≈ 66.7%. 2) Time-based pro rata at the end of Q3 = 75%; 66.7 ÷ 75 ≈ 89%: amber (just below green). 3) 2,400 − 1,600 = 800 children in Q4, well above the best quarter (620): actual capacity must be analysed before promising the target. 4) Girls are under-represented (42% against 51%): access barriers specific to girls? Unsuitable reporting channels? This must be discussed with communities and the team, without artificially pushing the figures, because case management must respond to a real need.

Key takeaways

- The MEAL plan details each indicator: definition, baseline, target, disaggregation, source, frequency, owner.
- Reading an ITT: compare the achievement rate with elapsed time; avoid double counting.
- A monthly review starts with outcomes and ends with written decisions.
- AI analyses anonymised data and feedback; check a sample and keep minority voices.
- Minimise, anonymise, approved tool, consent: no potentially harmful data in a non-approved tool.

Quiz

1. Target 1,000, 600 achieved at mid-project. Compared with the time-based pro rata (50%), the project is:
   A. Behind
   B. Ahead
   C. Exactly on time
   D. Impossible to say
2. One family receives three distributions. It counts as:
   A. Three families
   B. Zero families
   C. One family and three distributions
   D. Half a family
3. Before analysing community feedback with AI, you must first:
   A. Truly anonymise it and use an approved tool
   B. Translate it into English
   C. Delete negative complaints
   D. Ask the donor's permission
4. A complaint of sexual exploitation and abuse must be handled:
   A. By an automatic summary
   B. Publicly
   C. By the project manager alone
   D. Through the planned confidential channel, outside non-approved AI tools
5. The "L" in MEAL stands for:
   A. Logistics
   B. Learning
   C. Law
   D. Baseline

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. C · 3. A · 4. D · 5. B