A good start with S.M.A.R.T. (indicators)

SMART criteria were originally proposed as a management tool for project and program managers to set goals and objectives ([Doran 1981 and others](#)), but these days the SMART criteria have been well accepted in the field of monitoring and evaluation and have become an engrained, common best practice approach in developing indicators.

But what is SMART? Below an overview of what SMART means to various organizations:

Give me an "S"

Specific: The indicator must be able to be translated into operational terms and made visible. While the outcome/result itself can be broad, the indicator should be narrow and focus on the 'who' and 'what' of the intervention. Additionally, 'how' and 'where' the 'who' is doing the 'what' is important to include in the indicator as it provides the action for the intervention. The data collected clearly and directly relates to the achievement of an objective and not to any other objective.

Specific:

- Is it clear exactly what is being measured? Has the appropriate level of disaggregation been specified?
- Does the indicator capture the essence of the desired result?
- Does it capture differences across areas and categories of people?
- Is the indicator specific enough to measure progress towards the result? For example, using the indicator "increase by 20 per cent in number of criminal complaints filed" may reflect a more effective justice system OR an increase in crime. (8)

Specific: The indicator clearly and directly relates to the outcome. It is described without ambiguities. Parties have a common understanding of the indicator. (9)

Give me an "M"

Measurable: The indicator has the capacity to be counted, observed, analyzed, tested, or challenged. If one cannot measure an indicator, then progress cannot be determined. How will one know if the outcome has been achieved? Once an indicator is clear and specific, they can be measured in numerous ways; almost any indicator is in one way or another, measurable.

Give me an "A"

Achievable and Attributable: The system [monitoring and evaluation system and related indicators] identifies what changes are anticipated as a result of the intervention

and whether the results are realistic. Attribution requires that changes in the targeted developmental issue can be linked to the intervention.

Achievable / Attainable: The indicator is achievable if the performance target accurately specifies the amount or level of what is to be measured in order to meet the result/outcome. The indicator should be achievable both as a result of the program and as a measure of realism. The target attached to the indicator should be achievable.

Give me an "R"

Relevant: An indicator should be a valid measure of the result/outcome and be linked through research and professional expertise. The best way to think about relevance is to ensure that there is a relationship between what the indicator measures and the theories that help create the outcomes for the client, program, or system. The best method to find relevant indicators is to consult expert input and proper research.

Give me a "T"

Timely: Indicators must be timely in several aspects. First, they must be timely in terms of the time spent in data collection. This relates to the resources that are available - staff and partner time being critical. Second, indicators must reflect the timing of collection. Finally, the time-lag between output delivery and the expected change in outcome and impact indicators must also be reflected in the indicators that are chosen.

Time-Bound, Timely, Trackable, and Targeted: The system [monitoring and evaluation system and related indicators] allows progress to be tracked in a cost-effective manner at the desired frequency for a set period, with clear identification of the particular stakeholder group(s) to be affected by the project or program.