



USAID | **IRAQ**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

IMPROVING MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) FUNCTIONS OF USAID-INMA

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Improving Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Functions of USAID-*Inma*

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ACRONYMS

COP	CHIEF OF PARTY
M&E	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
GFA	GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS AREA
GF	GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS
ADG	AVERAGE DAILY GAIN
DBM	DEVELOPING DATABASE MANAGEMENT
IRS	INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Executive Summary

This report highlights observations made of the monitoring and evaluation processes at the USAID-*Inma* Agribusiness Project in Iraq. In addition the report provides a list of six recommendations to project management and to the monitoring and evaluation team that will improve the quality, consistency and accuracy of the data collected, stored and reported by the monitoring and evaluation team.

Recommendations can be summarized as follows: Empower the monitoring and evaluation team to actively do their work and provide that team with a trained specialist to lead them. Establish better collaboration and communicating among internal sections of USAID-*Inma* and provide those sections with reasonable deadlines for regularly submitting complete sets of data to the monitoring and evaluation team. Establish a system of checks and balances to ensure the validity of data before entering those data into the project database. Consolidate Excel spreadsheets into one location in electronic storage and catalog and document the contents and nature of the data in those spreadsheets.

A single-page form should be used to collect and provide data that can be summarized easily to indicate impact across much of the USAID-*Inma* work. USAID-*Inma* should continue to push forward with data collection, data entry, and data analysis. This will give the most comprehensive view of the USAID-*Inma* activities to date.

Inadequate M&E has two consequences:

- limited learning by implementers about the project's progress, opportunities, and problems; consequently, those involved have limited ability to correct operations and strategies, leading to sub-optimal impact on agricultural business development; and
- unclear impact performance, thus limited accountability to funding agency (USAID) and to primary stakeholders in terms of stated goals.

Some problems with M&E may have external causes that lie beyond the control of the project and restrict project activities, such as natural or human disasters or institutional environments. Other problems have conceptual causes, which may revolve around divergent or unclear perceptions of M&E methodology and analysis. Most remaining problems have operational causes due, perhaps, to insufficient personnel or the non-integration of M&E functions into project staff responsibilities.

Effective M&E can:

- provide managers with information that they need for day-to-day decisions in the ever-changing context of projects;
- provide early warning of problematic activities and processes that need corrective action;
- help empower those involved in project activity by creating opportunities for them to reflect critically on the project's direction and help decide on project improvements to be implemented;
- build understanding and capacity, motivate, and stimulate learning among those involved in the project; and
- assess progress and thus enable accountability requirements to be met.

Observations of M&E in USAID-*Inma* and Recommendations for Consideration

Observation I:

M&E staff members of USAID-*Inma* are dedicated individuals who desire to do their best to ensure the success of the M&E process. One is a long-time employee of USAID-*Inma*; she has endured the changes of COP, M&E coordinator, and almost total turnover of value chain and GFA staff. Her institutional memory is both an asset and a liability; She knows the history of M&E, but that knowledge may impede acceptance of new strategies and tools. The other two M&E staff members are new to their roles; they are eager but have little training and background in M&E activities. One has a degree in biotechnology, and he is at least familiar with agricultural terms and enterprises. The other is a bit more mature, but he has little knowledge of agriculture. All three seem to be waiting for direction and permission to proceed in a particular direction. In most other functional areas of USAID-*Inma*, there is an ex-pat team leader with specific expertise (i.e., training and experience) in the area. This is not the case with the M&E function.

Recommendation 1:

Management needs to provide further training and granting of permission to M&E staff members to do their jobs. M&E needs an M&E specialist to direct and lead the team and to coordinate accomplishment of the M&E function.

Observation 2:

Management's expectations of the M&E section, at this stage in the life of the USAID-*Inma* project, are primarily to document activities, accomplishments, and impacts of USAID-*Inma* and to meet accountability requirements of USAID. That is, M&E staff is needed more for evaluation and accountability than for monitoring.

M&E process is on-going, with data collection done periodically, but perhaps somewhat sporadically and as systematically as feasible in terms of frequency. Instability and insecurity, restricted movement, and limited access to supported businesses and assisted individuals negatively impact the ability of USAID-*Inma* to perform M&E to the highest levels.

Data collection is somewhat fragmented without a clear understanding of what staff (e.g., M&E, technical, value chain or GF) are primarily responsible for collection of what data and when. Because the same or similar data are collected by multiple entities there are often discrepancies in the data, without clear rules or systems for arbitrating and resolving those discrepancies. Discrepancies in data have affected staff members negatively in the past, thus many are reluctant to share data beyond their particular unit (e.g., livestock and forage value chain team or business development team).

There may be an issue with timing of data collection, internal reporting and subsequent reporting to USAID. Data may be needed by M&E staff for external reporting, but the data remains unavailable near deadline. M&E staff may, in turn, request those data from technical, value chain or GFA staff members. The data may then be reported to M&E staff via telephone. Miscommunication may occur. Data are recorded and subsequently reported to USAID before those data are verified by the original source. Next, M&E staff may request verification of the data, now, already reported to USAID, by the source. Sources may find that the data are incorrectly reported because of the miscommunication. Some of this may be attributed to GFA staff use of data collection instruments designed primarily for technical monitoring; these instruments typically are not designed to collect the same kinds of data required for program evaluation and accountability.

Recommendation 2:

Establish and communicate appropriate and realistic internal deadlines for data collecting, sharing internally, verification, summarizing, analyzing, and final verification by technical staff in advance of external reporting deadlines. In general, this means better collaboration and communicating among internal sections of USAID-*Inma*.

Observation 3:

M&E staff uses simple but fairly robust systems, employing Excel spreadsheets, databases and data analysis capabilities. However, there is no clear system of checks and balances to ensure that the analyses performed are correct. Technical value chain experts and GFA regional team members who are intimately familiar with the businesses and enterprises being evaluated should serve as the checks and balances system to determine if the summarized data can pass the "common sense test." In other words, much of the technical data reported, when summarized and analyzed, should be checked by

USAID-*Inma* staff that has knowledge of the types and sources of that data. An example of this checks and balances system is as follows: In a summary analysis of data, M&E may report that each animal in a beef feedlot gained on average 36 kg daily. Technical staff would immediately recognize that information as incorrect. That is, in their view of “common sense,” they know that it is not possible for an animal to gain 36 kg daily over a month-long period. With M&E staff and technical staff working together, they may discover that the 36 kg of gain was for a month rather than daily; thus, the average daily gain (ADG) should be 1.2 kg (36 kg total gain divided by 30 days in the month).

One often experienced phenomenon in the maturation of a bureaucracy or organization is the development of “silos”. That is, teams become enamored with their primary responsibilities and lose sight of the broader purposes, goals, and objectives of the larger organization. USAID-*Inma* is experiencing some of that phenomenon among its teams: M&E, training, business development, livestock and forages, field crops and horticulture and marketing. Each team is proud of its work and its job, and most concerned with its work as a primary responsibility. However, this primacy too often results in a situation in which, when critical needs in another functional area, that is not the primary responsibility of a particular team, arise, staff members outside the critical team respond with a kind of “that’s not my job attitude.” In reality, when one works for an organization—and it is always the organization that signs the paycheck and not one particular team—then the employees have responsibility in all areas. Because M&E is a cross-cutting issue, all members of the organization have responsibilities in that area. For instance, business development has a responsibility to provide information and data to M&E on sales, business plans, marketing, etc, of USAID-*Inma*-supported organizations. This may seem to be the role of M&E, but staff of M&E cannot be “experts” in business-related information. Too often when M&E staff collect data about agribusinesses, they incur very significant errors in the data. Because they are not experts and perhaps not even very familiar with the area of activity, they have no mechanism for self-correction, for recognizing quickly and easily that the data cannot be accurate. Again, there is a need for a system of “checks and balances,” a way to determine if data pass the “common sense test.” However, what may seem to be “common sense” to the business development team members may be unknown to an M&E staff member collecting, summarizing, and analyzing inaccurate data. Thus, there is a need for teams to break out of their “silos” and collaborate for the good of the organization, and ultimately, for the good of each team and each team member.

Recommendation 3:

Management and staff of USAID-*Inma* should work together to establish a system of checks and balances to ensure the validity of data before entering those data into a database. Again, after summarizing and analyzing data the results should be verified with technical staff. Especially before any data, summaries or interpretations are shared externally their validity and “common sense” should be cleared by technical staff.

Observation 4:

There is an effort to reconcile and interface the technical M&E data with the financial data in a common data base. This certainly is laudable, but a daunting task. I saw little evidence that the data from the operations or technical side of USAID-*Inma* was being used to populate any of the fields of the developing database management (DBM) system. Management needs to provide periodic and ongoing interim checks to ensure that the DBM system will, indeed, use data from M&E, including those data collected and reported by GFA and technical value chain staff. Additionally, DBM developers, engineers or programmers should demonstrate to technical staff what data are used, how those data are summarized and analyzed (what the programming algorithm is), and what report(s) can be generated. Iterative processes of input from technical staff to DBM programmers followed by demonstration of the

uses developed, followed by feedback from technical staff, will ensure that the data base is, indeed, productive and useful. Management should ensure that coordination and communications between DBM staff and technical staff occur often and periodically. There may even be a need for outside technical expertise to serve as the coordinator-communicator, go-between with DBM, technical staff and M&E.

A related issue is the vast array of disparate data contained within the USAID-*Inma* computer network. There are literally hundreds of files that exist on a number of limited-access share drives of USAID-*Inma*; these files contain: Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, picture files, PDF documents, and others. No systematic and communicated structure exists to guide management, staff members, or any others through this plethora of files and data. One suspects that, in particular, the Excel spreadsheets dispersed somewhat randomly among the drives and folders contain data pertinent to the M&E function and perhaps to other management functions. This lack of systemacy leaves USAID-*Inma* with little institutional memory or tracking capability in terms of its activities, accomplishments and impacts, especially as related to any ability to tie today's activities, accomplishments and impacts easily with those of yesterday or yesteryear.

Recommendation 4:

If data collected in the past are to have much usefulness to the present and future work of USAID-*Inma* then these data must be interfaced with current data. One particular pressing need is to consolidate Excel spreadsheets into one location in electronic storage and to catalog and document the contents and nature (which value chain, what data fields, when collected, where collected) of the data in those spreadsheets. Management should assign a staff member to work intensively and extensively on this project. One staff member has as one of her several assignments to catalog the share drive files of USAID-*Inma*; another is needed to work exclusively on COPYING (but not displacing) Excel files into one location/file folder structure. That structure should be developed a priori and jointly with input from management and DBM engineers.

Observation 5:

M&E forms used by USAID-*Inma* have proliferated to the level of several score (i.e., 60 or more forms). One request by USAID-*Inma* management was to develop a kind of "IRS-EZ" form that might be used with various kinds of agribusinesses, from farms to feedlots to packing sheds to feed mills. A single form was developed. It combines questions to capture data on impact indicators with generalizations to accommodate multiple kinds of agribusinesses.

Recommendation 5:

The more generic, single-page form should be used in USAID-*Inma* to provide data that can be summarized easily to indicate impact across much of USAID-*Inma*'s work. In addition, with proper data coding, the data could be disaggregated by program area and summarized separately for each kind of activity. Further, the forms already generated by USAID-*Inma* staff should continue be used in monitoring and formative evaluation by technical and GFA staff as they work with agribusinesses and agribusiness people to increase efficiency and effectiveness activities and outcomes that will eventually lead to impacts.

Observation 6:

Beginning in mid-November 2010, there was an active effort to survey approximately 10% of USAID-*Inma* beneficiaries via telephone interviews. Questionnaires were developed that were specific to one of five value chains: livestock, greenhouse, open field, irrigation, and agribusiness, and generic to all beneficiaries (business development). The survey involved efforts at phone contact with approximately 1,500 Iraqi farmers and agribusiness people who received direct benefit, ranging from training to feedlot installations, from USAID-*Inma*. While this effort was a substantial investment in staff resources, time and effort, the results of the survey should be of significant value in benchmarking USAID-*Inma* impacts. The use of a “now / then” (posttest and retrospective pretest) approach is supported in the literature (Rockwell & Kohn, 1989) as a legitimate, reliable, and valid method of data collection.

Recommendation 6:

Continue to push forward with data collection, data entry, and data analysis. This will give the most comprehensive look at USAID-*Inma*'s activities to date.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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- Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Rockwell, S. K., & Kohn, H. (1989, Summer). Post-then-pre evaluation. *Journal of Extension*, 27(2), 2FEA5.

APPENDIX

Questions of Management to Guide Activities of M&E Technical Specialist

How can all staff recognize their role in M&E, especially in the monitoring and data collection processes? How can roles and processes be more closely coordinated?

How can unresolved issues between technical, GFA, and M&E staff be resolved? That is, what is the mechanism for intervention of management in M&E processes that should and must involve all staff?

How does the M&E function and those with primary responsibility interface with database management developers? (e.g., Is it through the program officer?)

At this point in the USAID-*Inma* Project overall life, would you say that the primary responsibility for M&E staff and urgent need for USAID-*Inma* management is monitoring or evaluation or both M&E? That is, would you say that there is a bigger need for formative kinds of evaluation or summative kinds of evaluation or equal need for both?

ATTACHMENTS

One of the first requests by the M&E staff was for a data collection instrument that was short, preferably one page, and that could be used for practically any of USAID-*Inma*'s projects; one of the staff members used the analogy that it needed to be USAID-*Inma*'s version of the IRS "E-Z Form" used by many to report income and calculate income taxes in the U.S. Thus, the first attachment, a word file, is named as follows:

PRODUCTION SALES INCOME ADOPTION DIFFUSION Report Form 25Nov2010.doc

It is the so-called "E-Z form" to indicate that it is all-encompassing for USAID-*Inma*'s major impact indicators.

The second attachment resulted from a request by USAID-*Inma* management for a set of questions for use in focus groups with USAID-*Inma* beneficiaries; it is named as follows:

USAID-*Inma* Focus Group Question Guide 30Nov2010.docx

This form was developed after I returned stateside; I had originally developed similar questions prior to traveling to Iraq, and I had suggested that USAID-*Inma* collect some qualitative data from participants. Initially, however, I was requested to work specifically on quantitative indicators. I believe that USAID agreed that some qualitative data would be beneficial.

Next is an interview schedule named as follows:

Summative Evaluation Participant Questionnaire--USAID-*Inma* Nov2010.doc

It may be useful to collect information from participants in a quantitative manner but with much less precision than requested by the first form.

Other forms developed, which may be of use, are attached as follows:

Feedlots GROSS PRODUCTION and SALES Report Form 18Nov2010.doc

Feed mills PRODUCTION and SALES Report Form 18Nov2010.doc

These forms may serve to collect additional data not captured in the general form, attached first. Perhaps they can be used in monitoring by the technical staff and GFA members.

ADDENDUM/POST SCRIPT

Too often, I believe, so-called technical experts are brought in to deliver specific targeted guidance to a project, but they never leave their personal impressions and serendipitous findings from their viewpoint as an outsider to the day-to-day staff of a development project. As a senior consultant (at least in terms of years of professional service—and in comparative terms to USAID-*Inma* management), I believe that I have an obligation to share thoughts about the total experience. Perhaps these can serve as lessons learned and can be shared with others who serve as short term, “hired-gun types” of technical experts. Here are some of the serendipities from my short two weeks in Baghdad and with USAID-*Inma* staff:

USAID-*Inma* management and staff—ex-pats and local staff alike—do want to be successful. They recognize that success depends on their ability to help Iraq agribusinesses to function as a set of sustainable, profitable, integrated entities, taking agricultural products from farm gate to consumer plate. To use a production agriculture analogy, achieving that success “is a long row to hoe” in Iraq. This is due to many factors: thirty or more years of near-neglect of agricultural infrastructure; changing the economy from a command, centrally-planned economy to one that is market-driven; political and social unrest and safety concerns; limitations on travel of staff; corruption and lack of transparency, and many more.

It is difficult to have continuity and progress with COPs and other important personnel being often changed. It appears to me that this third wave of management, as is always the case has a particularly steep, uphill climb to “right the USAID-*Inma* ship” as the project continues toward its conclusion. I observed and interacted with management and staff who were working diligently to achieve success.

USAID-*Inma* personnel were open, accepting and congenial to me. I was never denied access to any person, any document, any request for information or assistance. Neither was I inundated with frivolous requests or information overload. In short, I could not have asked for a more courteous reception or treatment. For that, I wish to thank all of the staff of USAID-*Inma*.

Finally, to the beneficiaries of USAID-*Inma*, and its efforts in agricultural development and re-development, to the Iraqi agricultural community, I wish you success, safety, prosperity, hope, and peace.

Attachments:

I. Production Sales Income Adoption Diffusion Report Form November 25, 2010

For Use by	GFA	MONTH	MILEAGE/KM
M&E/DBM			Home to site=
Coding			Site to home=



PRODUCTION SALES INCOME ADOPTION DIFFUSION REPORT FORM (revised 25.11.2010)

Guide:

- a) Fill in this form for each Inma Beneficiary/Cooperator c) Forward completed form and the scan to Value Chain, GFA, and M&E
 b) Scan copy signed by Interviewee

1.	Today's date:	Time period this report covers:	From:	To:
----	---------------	---------------------------------	-------	-----

2.	Name of Farmer/ Owner/ Association Officer, etc:	3. Mobile Number: 3a. Contact Email Address:
----	--	---

4.	Town:	6. Grids:	North=
5.	District:		East=

INCOME/ SALES					
7.	Commodities/ Items Sold	Total Amount (Kg) or Number of Units Sold	Sale price per unit in ID:	Total Sales in ID	Total Sales in USD

8. Employees by Gender	Number	Job title /Occupation
TOTAL Number		
Number of Males Fulltime		
Number of Females Fulltime		
Number of Males Part time/Seasonal		
Number of Females Part time/ Seasonal		

9. Business Plan and Profitability:	Yes	No	
Does your operation have and use a business plan?			
Does your business plan include a marketing plan?			
Is your business making a profit now? Is business MORE profitable now than before Inma's help?			How much more profit now than before Inma's help? %

10. Input and Market Linkages:	Yes	No	Give EXAMPLES OF THOSE LINKAGES:
Does your operation have good sources of inputs?			
Does your operation have good markets for your outputs?			

11. What NEW SKILLS/NEW METHODS/NEW TECHNIQUES/NEW TECHNOLOGIES do you now use?
1.
2.
3.

12. How many OTHER farmers, agribusiness people, or others have you shared new information with?
___ None ___ 1 or 2 others ___ 3-5 others ___ 6-10 others ___ more than 10

13. Signatures:			
Name of Interviewee :		Signature:	
Name of Inma Staff:		Signature of Staff:	

2. USAID-Inma Focus Group Question Guide November 30, 2010

1. How are things going in your community? Has Inma had a positive impact on this community? If so, how? What are some specific examples of ways that things have improved because of Inma's assistance?
2. Has the community benefited FINANCIALLY from Inma's involvement in this community? In other words, are members of the community making more profit now than before because of Inma's assistance? What are some specific examples of ways that Inma assistance has positively affected farmers' and/or agribusinesses' profits?
3. Have farmers in the community adopted any of the technologies or practices recommended by Inma? Which ones? How have they helped those who have adopted them?
4. Are you able to provide for your family better now than before Inma's assistance?
5. What do you do different now than before Inma's assistance? Do you MARKET your production different now than before? Do you have linkages for inputs now that were not available before?
6. Have you encouraged or shown others how to do things that you learned from Inma?
7. What have you learned recently to do your job better? Where/How did you learn it?
8. What new tools or machinery have you or others in your community used recently?
9. Are you or others in your community producing anything new or different this year? Are you producing MORE now than before? About how much would you say that production has increased?
10. How have things changed here from last season to now? Are things better? Why? How?
11. Do you believe that this year is better for you than last? Why or why not?
12. What are your future plans? Are you happy with your work here?
13. Are things better this year than last? Why or why not?

14. Who has helped you with doing your job better?

15. Is the future for this community brighter/more positive because of Inma's assistance?

16. What is one thing that Inma could do for the community in the future that would make the biggest positive impact on the community? [This may be one of the LAST questions to ask!]

3. Summative Evaluation Participant Questionnaire, USAID-Inma November, 2010

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION FORM



Does your operation have a 3-year business plan? ___yes ___no

Does your business have a marketing plan? ___yes ___no

How many full-time employees does your business employ? _____

How many are male? _____

How many are female? _____

How many part-time employees does your business employ? _____

How many are male? _____

How many are female? _____

Have you improved your productivity working with Inma? ___ yes ___no

If yes, how? _____

How much? _____%

Have your profits improved by working with Inma? ___ yes ___no

If yes, how much? _____%

Why or how were you able to increase your profit? _____

What were your gross sales . . .

_____last week? OR _____last month? OR _____last year?

How much have your gross sales increased working with Inma? _____%

Have you improved linkages for input and output markets? ___yes ___no

If yes, explain how: _____

Name of Interviewer _____ Name of Participant _____

Date _____ Province _____ Project Type _____

4. Feedlots Gross Production and Sales Report Form November 18, 2010

GFA	MONTH	MILEAGE/KM
		Home to site=
		Site to home=



FEEDLOT SITE VISIT GROSS PRODUCTION and SALES REPORT FORM (revised 17.11.2010)

Guide:

- a) Fill in this form for each Inma Beneficiary/Cooperator c) Forward completed form and the scan to Value Chain, GFA, and M&E
 b) Scan copy signed by Interviewee

1.	Today's date:	Time period this report covers:	From:	To:
2.	Name of Farmer/Owner/Association Officer, etc:	3. Person's Mobile Number:		
4.	Town:	6. Grids:	North=	
5.	District:		East=	

INCOME/ SALES					
7.	Animals Sold	Total Amount Sold Head and KILOGRAMS	Sale price per KG in ID:	Total Sales in ID	Total Sales in USD

8. Employees by Gender	Number	Job title /Occupation
TOTAL Number		
Number of Males Fulltime		
Number of Females Fulltime		
Number of Males Part time/Seasonal		
Number of Females Part time/Seasonal		

9. Business Plan:	Yes	No	Notes on Use of Business Plan/Marketing Plan
Does your operation have a business plan?			
Does the business plan include a marketing plan?			
Is business making a profit?			

10.	Field Records:	Date of last entry	Date of first entry
	Records of sales/income		
	Records of purchases/ costs		
	Production records/ notes		

11. What suggestions does the farmer/owner/interviewee have for Inma?
12. What NEW SKILLS/NEW METHODS/NEW TECHNIQUES/NEW TECHNOLOGIES are being used?
1.
2.
3.

13. Signatures:			
Name of Interviewee :		Signature:	
Name of Inma Staff:		Signature of Staff:	

5. Feed Mill Production and Sales Report Form November 18, 2010

GFA	MONTH	MILEAGE/KM
		Home to site=
		Site to home=



FEED MILL SITE VISIT–PRODUCTION and SALES REPORT FORM (revised 17.11.2010)

Guide:

- a) Fill in this form for each Inma Beneficiary/Cooperator c) Forward completed form and the scan to Value Chain, GFA, and M&E
 b) Scan copy signed by Interviewee

1.	Today's date:		Time period this report covers:	From:	To:
----	---------------	--	---------------------------------	-------	-----

2.	Name of Feed Mill Operation/Owner/Manager		3. Person's Mobile Number:	
----	---	--	----------------------------	--

4.	Town:		6.Grids:	North=
5.	District:			East=

PRODUCTION and SALES					
7.	Feed Produced by Type	Amount of Feed Produced/Sold in Tons	Sale price per Ton in ID:	Total Sales in ID	Total Sales in USD

8. Employees by Gender	Number	Job title /Occupation
TOTAL Number		
Number of Males Fulltime		
Number of Females Fulltime		
Number of Males Part time/Seasonal		
Number of Females Part time/Seasonal		

9. Business Plan:	Yes	No	Notes on Use of Business Plan/Marketing Plan
Does the operation have a business plan?			
Does the business plan include a marketing plan?			
Is business making a profit?			

10.	Field Records:	Date of last entry	Date of first entry
	Records of sales/income		
	Records of purchases/ costs		
	Production records/notes		

11. What suggestions does the farmer/owner/interviewee have for Inma?
12. What NEW SKILLS/NEW METHODS/NEW TECHNIQUES/NEW TECHNOLOGIES are being used?
1.
2.
3.

13. Signatures:			
Name of Interviewee :		Signature:	
Name of Inma Staff:		Signature of Staff:	