One system to rule them all?
A discussion on M&E system adoption
The Problem

Planning
Objectives were multiple and not clearly related to project activities. There was no clear picture of what the project would look like if it were successful. Thus, evaluators could not compare — in an objective manner — what was planned with what actually happened.

Management Responsibility Was Unclear
Project managers were committed to the fact that projects must be justified in terms of their ultimate late benefits (“impact”) yet were reluctant to be considered responsible for impact; there were too many important factors outside their control. They found it difficult to articulate what they should be responsible for, and ended up not accepting any responsibility for results.

Evaluation Was An Adversarial Process
With the absence of clear targets and frequent disagreements (even among project team members) as to just what the project was about, evaluators ended up using their own judgment as to what they thought were “good things” and “bad things.” The subsequent evaluation results would then frequently become a basis for further argument about what was good or bad, rather than resulting in constructive actions for project improvement.

- The Logical Framework
The Solution

“Build an information system into [your] project so that the necessary data [can] be collected in the course of regular project operations. Such a system can provide timely, relevant information that can be used by decision-makers throughout the course of the project.”

- The Logical Framework
We have the technology!1!

Perhaps too much technology...
Monitoring has often taken a back seat to evaluation (Kusek, 2004, etc.).

Adaptive management and ‘agile’ programming demand iteration and data.

Monitoring is essential for effective evaluation.

There’s a growing number of evaluation methodologies incorporate monitoring.
Said another way…

Monitoring is the new evaluation.
So, what does it take to get on board?

Organizational Systems

Functional Spec.

“M&E System”

Existing M&E Systems

Change Management
Two Key Points:

1. Define what a "successful" implementation looks like. What problems does it actually solve? How is it used? Both dream success and realistic success.

2. The tool is only as good as the data it contains, the people using it, and the processes in place around it. It's not a silver bullet or a magic bean. Focusing on attainable goals and realistic problems to solve with it (and then doing the work to make that happen) are the clear way toward a successful implementation. Sometimes all you might need to solve your problems is Excel; sometimes your problems actually aren't solvable with software at all; etc.
Things to watch out for
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How standards proliferate:
(See: A/C chargers, character encodings, instant messaging, etc.)

Situation: There are 14 competing standards.

14?! Ridiculous! We need to develop one universal standard that covers everyone's use cases. Yeah!

Soon:

Situation: There are 15 competing standards.
Things to watch out for

USAID 2017
For the first time in history, we have the tools, technologies and approaches to end extreme poverty.

Jeffery Sachs 2005
For the first time in history, … scientific and technological process… has placed the world within reach of eliminating extreme poverty altogether.

John F Kennedy 1961
For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of [those living in conditions approaching misery].

Robert Owen 1857
Through the process of physical and mental science… all the.. means in superabundance to well-feed, clothe, lodge, train, educate, amuse and govern the human race in perpetual progressive prosperity – without war… these results may now, for the first time in history of the world, be accomplished†.