
CHAPTER 2

MONITORING AND EVALUATION AS A PROCESS

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Monitoring and Evaluation: Definitions

Monitoring is an on-going activity during the life of the project. It is through monitoring that the project is able to determine what progress has been made in relation to the work plan. Monitoring helps in ascertaining whether the project is on track, and also in determining whether the project needs to make any changes in its strategies or activities so that it can be as successful as possible.

Evaluation determines how successful the project has been in meeting its objectives, as well as in assessing the impact of project activities on desired outcomes, like knowledge or behavior. Project evaluation begins with a baseline survey which is carried out before project activity begins; project evaluation concludes when data are collected again through an end-of-project survey, and then compared to baseline information. When funds allow, some projects also have a mid-term evaluation which occurs half-way through the project's implementation.

TWO APPROACHES TO PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The CORE Initiative promotes participatory approaches to project development and implementation because it seeks to involve people who will take part in and will be affected by a project throughout the entire process, from defining the goal to evaluating the project's impact once it has ended. This is in contrast to a more conventional approach, where people who are not part of the community—such as donor representatives or external consultants—are primarily responsible for identifying needs, developing a general project concept, providing money and other resources, then monitoring and evaluating project activities. While it is true that a local CBO or FBO or NGO plays a key role in project implementation, with the conventional approach, there is

typically limited or very little input from beneficiaries or participants at the initial stages when the project is being developed.

As opposed to conventional approaches, participatory design, monitoring and evaluation promote and sustain relationships between and involvement of different stakeholders, within and outside the CBO and FBO. Involving the community from the very beginning ensures that the project evolves around people's felt needs, and is therefore more responsive and adapted to local conditions. The participatory process also builds and promotes the community's ownership of the project. These are important factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of any community activity. In some cases, the participatory process will promote change in individual attitudes and community norms, since the project development and implementation process necessitates that community members reflect and analyze their own attitudes, beliefs and behavior. And participatory monitoring and evaluation is in itself a capacity-building activity—it builds CBO and FBO and community capacities not only in design, monitoring and evaluation but also in project management.

THE PROJECT CYCLE: CONVENTIONAL VERSUS PARTICIPATORY¹

What is a project cycle? Project cycle refers to the process through which a project evolves, from its outset to completion. In the early stages of project development, certain steps logically precede others; for example, it is critical to collaborate with community members to identify needs before thinking about activities and strategy. But once a project is underway, it is desirable to learn from

Phases of the Conventional Project Cycle

1. Needs Assessment or Appraisal
2. Project Design
3. Baseline Data Collection
4. Project Implementation
5. Monitoring and Reflection
6. Evaluation
7. Documentation

¹ Adapted from UNFPA. 2000. The Program Manager's Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit. Office of Oversight and Evaluation. New York.

your experience and adapt the project's strategies and activities as you go. Typically, a project organized along more conventional lines, that is, with limited involvement of beneficiaries, goes through seven phases as shown in the text box on the previous page.

The project cycle for a participatory project is somewhat different from that used in a conventional project.

Phases of the Participatory Project Cycle

1. Participatory Appraisal
2. Participatory Planning and Project Design
3. Participatory Development of Baseline Indicators
4. Participatory Baseline Data Collection
5. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Plan Design
6. Participatory Implementation
7. Participatory Monitoring and Review
8. Participatory Evaluation
9. Feedback and Participatory Decision-making

As can be seen from the text box on the left, a participatory project builds on the involvement of the community at every stage of the project process. It's important

to point out here that participatory development is an incremental process – i.e. it builds, and grows, step by step – and it is best to follow these steps in a sequence. The best results are achieved when a project adopts a participatory approach as a way of working, i.e. follows a participatory approach at all stages of the project. There are limited benefits in trying to introduce participatory monitoring in a project when the project was not designed with the active participation of the communities it wants to serve. Therefore, if a CBO or FBO is interested in introducing PM&E in its project, it is best to start with participatory design and planning.

COMPARING CONVENTIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY M&E

Participatory development is not a new idea. Considerable experience exists around the world in participatory development processes. The 1990's in particular witnessed an explosion of new ideas, methods and experiments in participation. There also exists a rapidly growing body of literature on

participatory development. However, on closer examination, little of this literature relates to participatory appraisal, and only slightly more to implementation and evaluation. There is a general dearth of documentation on participatory monitoring. The focus of this manual, therefore, will be on participatory design, monitoring and evaluation. In this section, the reader will learn about the major differences between conventional M&E and participatory M&E.

Both conventional and participatory M&E seek to determine if a project is on course and whether the project has achieved or will likely achieve the objectives set out in the beginning. The difference between the two M&E approaches is that with conventional M&E the donor and implementing agency usually drive the process. Naturally, donors and implementing agencies need information on a regular basis to judge how well a project is performing. Just as CBO and FBO field staff have an obligation to report back to their own headquarters, donors must also report back to their governments on the results produced by foreign assistance money which has been invested in development projects. These findings are then used to determine future funding decisions at global, national and local levels.

In light of their information needs, once the project is designed, the donor and/or implementing agency define expected outcomes, and designate indicators against which to measure achievement as well as the acceptable means of measurement. The donor also defines reporting frequency – how many times a year a report must be filed.

What tends to happen is that CBO and FBO staff who collect monitoring data are not always sure why they are collecting the information, and pass it up the chain of supervisors until it is eventually incorporated into a report for the donor. Monitoring data collected under these circumstances are not often analyzed by field staff and are therefore infrequently used to make decisions

about adapting the project's strategy or activities. At the end of the project, the donor normally requires an external project evaluation, which is carried out by a team of experts who visit the project site and collect the necessary data. While many donors recognize the importance of sharing evaluation reports with development partners and local communities, it is not unusual for these stakeholders to not receive a copy.

Conventional M&E



Participants representing a range of faith-based organizations in Uganda assisted the CORE Initiative in developing materials for the Prototype PME Manual. In the above diagram of conventional monitoring and evaluation, the participants depict a Program Officer (PO) on the right meeting with the community in a focus group discussion and gathering the required information she or he needs to report to the donor. The PO processes the information, and sends it to the implementing faith-based organization which in turn sends the report on to the donor who may or may not respond. From the arrows, we see that the flow of information is uni-directional – going in one direction – from the community up to the donor. The community's contribution is limited in that they are simply providing the requested information, but have no role in how that information may be used.

Not surprisingly, with such an approach, monitoring and evaluation typically are viewed as an unavoidable burden carried out for the sole purpose of reporting to the donor. One factor contributing to this situation is lack of ownership: the beneficiary community and the CBO and FBO implementing the project do not have a defined, respected role in the overall process. The community plays no role except to provide information when they are asked,

and the CBO and FBO play only a passive role in collecting and providing information to the donor. Furthermore, the project beneficiaries do not stand to benefit from the process even indirectly, since this information is not usually shared with them. When the monitoring indicators and plan are determined externally, it's not easy for project beneficiaries or the implementing CBO and FBO to tap that information for their own benefit. Simply put, with conventional M&E, those implementing or participating in the project are denied ownership over the process and generally derive few, if any, benefits from M&E efforts.

Reminder: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is an integral part of the participatory project design and implementation process. It works best when the entire project process, from planning to the final evaluation, are carried out in a participatory manner.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation significantly differs from conventional M&E in that the community, beneficiaries and people involved in designing and implementing the project, are involved in monitoring and evaluation throughout the project's duration. In the monitoring process, in consultation and collaboration with donors, the community and beneficiaries together with implementers decide what will be monitored and how the monitoring will be carried out. They together analyze the information gathered through monitoring and assess whether the project is on track in achieving its objectives. Based on this information, they decide together whether the project should continue in the same direction or if it needs to be modified.

Participatory monitoring enables project participants themselves to generate, analyze and use information for their day-to-day decision-making as well as long term planning.

In participatory evaluation, just as in participatory monitoring, the beneficiary community and CBOs and/or FBOs together decide how to conduct the

evaluation – its timing, scope, methodology and so on. The group also determines what they would like to find out through evaluation; in other words, they decide the issues and indicators that will be covered by the evaluation; they help formulate the questions to be asked; they participate in collecting and analyzing data, and presenting the findings. If a project follows a participatory approach from the beginning, it's easy to carry out a participatory evaluation at the end.



In this visual, participants from the materials development workshop held in Uganda show how with participatory monitoring and evaluation, the flow of information is multi-dimensional. First, information is generated and shared at the community level through a focus group discussion. Then, it is processed by the Program Officer/group facilitator and shared with the implementing FBO who in turn reports back to both the community and the donors. The community is more involved in the process and the information is used at all levels to make decisions about the project.

While conventional monitoring and evaluation focus on measurement of results – service delivery, information dissemination, behavior change and so on – participatory monitoring and evaluation focus on both results and process. The main characteristics of this process are inclusion, collaboration, collective action and mutual respect. Participatory M&E encourages dialogue at the grassroots level and moves the community from the position of passive

beneficiaries to active participants with the opportunity to influence the project activities based on their needs and their analysis. In addition, information is shared both horizontally and vertically within the implementing organization. It is generated by the community group and shared first with the larger community, and then with the donor. In contrast to conventional monitoring where information moves vertically – from the CBO or FBO to the donor – in participatory monitoring, information is much more widely shared, particularly at its source which is the community.

Observations on the value of PM&E from Peter Muyingo, Monitoring and Documentation Officer, GOAL Uganda:

“If there is willingness and resources to actually do PM&E, it would be beneficial because one is using local people who are in the field, doing the actual work, and they have a stake in the outcomes. PM&E enables them to shape the actual program and be involved in its evolution. This gives staff and volunteers a feeling that the project is not simply imposed on them, but is participatory with a joint decision-making process.”

From his experience with PLAN in Uganda, Peter notes that PM&E requires a lot of resources in terms of money, time and skills, and such resources may not be readily available in many FBO settings.

Françoise Coupal (2001), an expert in participatory monitoring and evaluation, summarizes the differences between conventional M&E and PM&E in the table on the next page.

Table 1. Conventional M&E vs. Participatory M&E

	Conventional M&E	Participatory M&E
Who Initiates?	Donor	The donor + project stakeholders
Purpose?	Donor Accountability	Capacity-building, increase ownership over results, multi-stakeholder accountability
Who Evaluates?	External Evaluator	Project stakeholders assisted by a PM&E Facilitator
Terms of Reference	Donor with limited input from project	Project stakeholders
Methods	Survey, Questionnaire, Semi-structured interviewing, Focus Group Discussions	Range of methods such as Participatory Learning and Action, Appreciative Inquiry, Testimonials
Outcome	Final report circulated within the donor institution, with copies to project management at CBO and FBO	Better understanding of local realities; stakeholders involved in analysis and decision-making regarding what to do with information to adjust project strategies and activities to better meet results

Source: Coupal, Francoise, July 2001. Results-based Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation

The examples below illustrate the two approaches to monitoring and evaluation. You may find it useful to use these examples when discussing conventional and participatory M&E with staff and community members.

Organization A

Every month, field staff collect the number of condoms distributed in health centers, and report those figures to their project manager. Every month, the project manager adds up the distribution numbers, and sends the report to the donor. The donor enters the figures into a computer, and generates a report for the Ministry of Foreign Assistance. Very few people actually look at the data to see what it is saying. Is condom distribution increasing or decreasing? Will the project reach its objective to reduce sexually transmitted infections? How can field staff, health center staff and community members work together to make the project a success?

Organization B

Every month, field staff collect the number of condoms distributed in health centers. Community representatives, health center staff and project field staff discuss this information during their monthly review meetings. These data are then sent to project headquarters for forwarding to the donor. When the number of condoms distributed decreased, the local stakeholders tried to figure out why by asking clients. With a simple change in strategy, they were able to once again increase the number of condoms distributed. Monitoring information was used within the organization to improve the program, and also to report to the donor.

USING BOTH CONVENTIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY M&E

Given the way that most foreign assistance programs currently operate, donors who fund CBOs and FBOs will continue to need data to show how their funds have been invested in development, and how they have contributed to project impact. For the time being, CBO and FBOs can expect that most donors will include a requirement in grants and contracts for the regular submission of program and financial reports. It's possible to fulfill such a requirement while at the same time meeting the needs of the community. Participatory and conventional M&E can be effectively combined: what the donor requires and what PM&E offers are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the same information collected through a participatory monitoring process can often be presented to the donor in a slightly different format.

As the manual describes in subsequent chapters, PM&E often focuses on collecting qualitative data, such as participants' opinions about how useful a training program has been for them and what needs to be improved for future trainings. The donor, given their needs, seeks information that is more quantitative in nature, such as how many training programs were conducted during the month, and how many women and men were trained. With the right data collection tool, in this case a training registry, it's easy to provide this kind of information to a donor, and it's also useful information for the project staff and community members. That's not to say, however, that qualitative information is less valuable than quantitative information. Often qualitative data tell the story behind quantitative data. When reporting to the donor, these data allow field staff to explain why things haven't progressed as planned; when discussing project progress with the community, these data allow field staff, beneficiaries and community members to adapt an activity to so that it can be more effective.

The reason that donors, CBOs and FBOs tend to seek out different types of information is because each has different needs. Donors, because they collect

information from so many organizations, try to focus on indicators that can be easily reported and summarized: number of people trained, number of condoms distributed, and number of youth counseled. CBOs and FBOs, on the other hand, benefit from a more in-depth analysis of the successes and shortcomings of the project. Given the needs of both parties, conventional and participatory monitoring and evaluation can be effectively combined to fulfill both needs.