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# CHAPTER 7

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## PARTICIPATORY PROCESS MONITORING

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In this chapter we introduce process monitoring and its key elements, as well as describe how to carry out process monitoring in practice.

### **WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY PROCESS MONITORING?**

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As discussed in Chapter 2, monitoring refers to the process of keeping track of progress, and reviewing whether project implementation is progressing according to plan. In order to carry out any kind of monitoring, it is essential that we start with a monitoring plan. The monitoring plan tells us what we need to monitor (the indicators for measuring progress), how we carry this out (who is responsible for collecting information, how often, and by what means), and how this information will be analyzed and used while implementing the project.

Process monitoring, therefore, refers to maintaining records, analyzing information, and sharing the results with all the project partners on a regular basis. This information and its analysis should provide a clear picture regarding:

- ✓ whether the project and its various activities are being implemented as planned;
- ✓ identify problem areas, if any, (for example, some activities are not moving as planned, implementation is slow in some communities, and so on); and,
- ✓ what is working well.

This type of analysis is possible only when information is regularly collected, recorded and analyzed. Therefore, it is critical that everyone involved be clear about which indicators are being monitored, as well as how the information will be collected and used.

**There is one key difference between participatory process monitoring and conventional monitoring.** In the case of participatory process monitoring, community members, that is, the direct beneficiaries of the project, play an active role in monitoring. They maintain records at the community level, analyze progress, and use this information to make decisions about project implementation.

Very often monitoring is considered to be a donor requirement, and therefore all monitoring activities are geared towards producing reports for the donors. While timely reporting to the donors is important, monitoring plays a key role within a project, and it is the most effective when used by project participants and project implementers to review progress and use the information to make day-to-day decisions.

It may not always be possible, or desirable, for everyone at the community level to maintain records and analyze information. In this case, community members can select a person or a small group of people to take on this responsibility for the community. However, all beneficiaries should have access to monitoring information, and this information should be shared periodically with the community so that community members are fully informed when decisions regarding project implementation are taken collectively. This can be done during regular meetings with the community; progress for the past period, for example, a month, is discussed, and decisions are made for the subsequent time period. While these regular meetings can be run by community volunteers associated with the project, if possible, a project

staff member should be present. Such a process ensures active involvement of all concerned in the review and planning process.

## **KEY ELEMENTS OF PROCESS MONITORING**

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### **RECORDING INFORMATION**

Maintaining records is the first step in developing a monitoring system. Unless there is a regular update on key activities and selected indicators, it is not possible to build a monitoring system. The following issues need to be considered in order to design data recording systems:

#### ***What is the unit of analysis?***

To start we need to decide how we are going to record all of the information related to the project. Shall we record information at the individual/household level or should we keep the community as a unit of analysis? This can vary from project to project. For projects working directly with households or individuals, for example, projects providing support to orphans, information has to be recorded for each individual receiving support. Other activities, such as peer education for youth, may require records at the community or school level.

#### ***Who maintains records?***

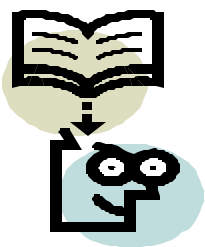
Since most of the implementation takes place at the community level, data recording starts in the community. With assistance from project staff, community members should devise a mechanism for data collection and recording. They can either select a person to take on this responsibility, or they can organize a group of volunteers to rotate responsibility for data collection and recording. If the project is very small, and works with only two or three households in a village, it can provide notebooks or diaries for the participants to record their own information.

Some projects also ask staff, and sometimes representatives from communities, to maintain diaries. The diary is used to record observations, problems encountered, questions, concerns, suggestions - anything related to the project. These entries are made on a regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly), and then these diaries are submitted to the staff member in charge of project monitoring. Someone carefully reads the diaries, compiles qualitative information from them, and then analyzes that information. The findings are shared and discussed with project staff, project partners and community members. Using diaries as a monitoring tool is most useful when there is immediate response to the issues raised. Diaries are also useful in recording the history of the project.

At the project level, a staff member will have clear responsibility for collecting information and analyzing the same for project purposes. If the project is small, this responsibility may be taken up by one person. Larger projects usually have at least one person dedicated to monitoring, and some projects may even have a separate monitoring unit with two or three staff. Whether it is a single individual carrying out monitoring along with other responsibilities, or it is a project monitoring unit, the function remains the same. Their challenge is to ensure that quality project information reaches them in a timely manner.

### ***How often will information be gathered?***

For all activities, it is critical to collect and record data when the activity occurs, but data will probably be gathered for the purposes of project monitoring after the activity has occurred. For example, counselors at a Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center necessarily record client visits on a daily basis. Project staff don't usually conduct field visits on a daily basis, so they will gather the VCT Center's monitoring data on a weekly or monthly basis.



## **Remember!**

Information can be put to good use only when it is collected and analyzed in a timely manner.

It is critical that the frequency of data collection and its analysis be decided at the project's beginning. Timely information is crucial in evolving a good information system. Since projects are often required to make immediate decisions regarding implementation, it's critical that information be available to inform these decisions. In a food project for AIDS orphans, there is little value in learning that food stocks ran out three months ago. If this information is available in a timely manner, the project can take action to correct the situation.

## **QUALITATIVE INFORMATION**

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Qualitative information refers to how the implementation process is being carried out. Rather than focus on project outputs, it focuses on the quality of the implementation. This includes issues such as whether village meetings are being held regularly; who attends these meetings; whether men and women are getting an equal opportunity to participate in the project; whether there is transparency in the decision making process; and so on. Some of this information can be quantified (for example, the number of women and men taking part in activities), however, most qualitative monitoring comes from observations and discussions. Diaries, minutes from meetings, focus group discussions or in-depth interviews with partners and community members, and review workshops generate qualitative information about a project. Hence, it is important to maintain minutes and reports properly.

## **SEPARATING DATA ON THE BASIS OF GENDER**

Wherever possible, data should be recorded separately for men and women. For example, when recording information on participation in a training program, we should note “25 women and 30 men attended the training program”, rather than “a total of 55 participants took part in the training”. Such information helps the project to determine whether it is maintaining gender balance across activities, and if not, to take corrective measures.

Continuing with the example of training, a monitoring report for the month of March 2003 showed that an NGO trained 10 women and 7 men in Village #2. The reporting of these data should lead to a discussion with project staff and community members on whether this is appropriate and satisfactory. On the face of it, it would appear that fewer men than women participated in training. If the project wants to train men and women in equal numbers in all categories of project activity, then it is important to carry the analysis to the next step. Questioning could begin along the following lines: Why did fewer men than women take part in training during March? Were there critical production activities that occupied the men during the month? What was the representation of men and women in the different types of training offered? Are men and women attracted to different types of activities based on social roles and cultural norms? Does the project need to increase the number of men taking part in training programs? How should project staff plan training activities scheduled for April, given results in March?

## **AGGREGATING INFORMATION**

Data aggregation refers to compiling all of the information on various indicators and activities from all of the households and communities where the project intervenes. For example, if the NGO described above is working in three villages, process monitoring will take place in all three villages. The NGO will

collect information from each village, and compile the information in order to prepare one monthly report for the project.

In order to compile such a report, the NGO needs to have a clear understanding on how this information will be generated at the community level and shared with the project staff. Some projects may have community representatives sending the information every month by post, and in other cases, the project staff may visit the communities on a given date to collect the information. In order to generate comparable information, all of the communities in a project use the same monitoring report format. Otherwise it will be very difficult to compile and analyze the information.

Information should be aggregated in such a manner that it is easy to understand and use the data. For the NGO working in 3 villages, the compiled report for training activity could look like the following:

**Example of a Training Report for the Month of March 2003**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Village 1</b>		<b>Village 2</b>		<b>Village 3</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Number of participants attending Village Health Committee training	2	5	3	5	5	6	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>
Number of participants attending adolescent HIV awareness-raising workshop	5	2	6	1	5	5	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>
Number of participants attending monitoring workshop	0	2	1	1	0	2	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
Total number of participants trained	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>

The hypothetical example above shows how information can be compiled in such a way that it is possible to compare progress across villages as well as by gender, that is, male and female, and by activity. Note that the table shows only the physical aspect of the training activity. Each activity would also involve the use of resources and supplies. There should be a separate format for monitoring these aspects of project implementation which is usually available from the project office and is monitored by the accounts-in charge.

### ***How often should data be aggregated?***

Frequency of data aggregation depends upon the type of activities being implemented. Monthly aggregation works well for most projects. Waiting longer than a month to review progress may not have much value for the project.

### ***Who takes responsibility for data aggregation?***

Data aggregation is usually done by the project staff. However, there can be instances where the community participants decide to meet once every month and carry out the data aggregation as well as review the progress.

## **ANALYZING INFORMATION**

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Data analysis refers to converting raw data into information, and then reviewing the information in order to ascertain whether the project is running on course. As discussed in the earlier example, someone needs to look at the information and determine: whether activities are running as planned; whether some communities are progressing better than the others, and so on. Any deviation from the project implementation plan signals the need to examine the process closely. It is possible that some of the activity planning had been unrealistic and needs to be modified. Monitoring helps in making such changes.

One important point to keep in mind here is that the analysis should be kept simple so that everyone can follow it easily. The second important point is the importance of timely information. When information is available on time, it has a lot of value and can be put to use by the project. Late information is of little use to anyone.

## **SHARING INFORMATION**

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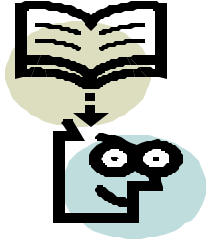
Information is useful when it is used. Monitoring information can be used only when it is regularly shared and reviewed by all the project partners.

### ***Sharing information within the project***

Once the monitoring report is ready, it should be shared with all project staff so that progress can be reviewed with concrete evidence. Most projects hold monthly review meetings, and are conducted in two steps. The first review meeting is held with project staff. The monitoring information is discussed at this meeting and decisions at a project level are taken. The second meeting is held with representatives from the communities, so that they also get a chance to review progress and present their views. This provides an opportunity to take joint decisions for community-level activity. A copy of the monthly monitoring report should be shared with the community representatives.

### ***Reporting to donors***

In all donor-funded projects, the donors who provided the funding ask the CBOs/FBOs to report on their progress and achievements. This information also helps the donors to plan for future funding and technical support activities. Refer to Chapter 8 for guidance on reporting.



## **Remember!**

- Regular and timely data collection, that is analyzed and used by the project are the key features of a good monitoring system.
- Keep the monitoring process simple, so that everyone can participate in it, and use the information
- Monitoring starts at the community level, by the project participants themselves
- Monitoring should include both, qualitative as well as quantitative information
- Monitoring is useful when the information it generates is used by the project beneficiaries and the implementing agency on a regular basis
- Information can be put to good use only when it is collected regularly and in time.