

Public Involvement through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

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Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is a social process that uses new ways to bring people together, it is a cultural process that helps people to understand different views and it is a political process of sharing decisions (Guijt, Arevalo and Saladores, 1998). Participatory monitoring and evaluation supports active involvement within the monitoring and evaluation process for those who have a vested interest in a program or research project: providers, partners, customers, along with any other interested parties. Ideally, participation happens during all phases of the evaluation, from the planning and design to preparing an action plan to improve the performance of the program, whether it is a forest management project or an HIV/AIDS prevention program (Binnendijk, 1996). Monitoring is the systematic, routine accumulation and occasional analysis of information to find and possibly measure changes over a period of time. Evaluation analyzes the performance and direction of a research project or program, and also involves judging the progress or impact of that program (Vernooy, 1999).

PM&E Characteristics

There are numerous characteristics that separate participatory monitoring and evaluation from traditional evaluation approaches. Monitoring and evaluation in a more traditional sense is driven by the agency implementing the evaluation. There is generally no discussion in this approach, because the agency defines the outcomes and selects indicators for which to measure their achievement. Also with traditional monitoring and evaluation an outside evaluator would be brought in to oversee the evaluation. Within participatory evaluations the focus is more on the information needs of the program stakeholders rather than the agency doing the evaluation. Due to the diversity of

views and opinions, there needs to be negotiations between participants because they need to communicate and come to a consensus about the findings of the evaluation, how to solve problems and how to improve the effectiveness of their program. For participants, the whole process can be a learning experience with importance focused on the lessons that were learned. This will help them develop a better understanding of how to improve the program for the next time around. Finally with participatory monitoring and evaluation it is the participants who oversee the evaluation (Binnendijk, 1996).

Why PM&E?

So why conduct participatory monitoring and evaluation? First, participatory monitoring and evaluation will allow one to generally improve their program or research project. It enables one to identify the problems, find out why those problems are occurring, find solutions, and enhance the program plan and implementation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation will also reveal how well the program is doing at meeting the needs of the local community, government, and researchers (Vernooy, 1999). It benefits the participants' learning and understanding of the program and its performance, while improving their comprehension of other participant's points of view. Furthermore, participatory monitoring and evaluation can improve the evaluation skills of participants, increase teamwork, and create opportunities for the information generated from the evaluation to be used to enhance performance (Binnendijk, 1996).

There are four main principles of participatory monitoring and evaluation that have been worked out over time and through experience: participation, learning, negotiation, and flexibility. An emphasis on the participation aspect, differentiates participatory monitoring and evaluation from approaches that are more traditional. When people are actually involved in the whole process of deciding when and how to monitor, evaluate, analyze, communicate and use all of the information, is when participatory monitoring and evaluation become a

“real partnership in development” (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998). Learning within the participatory monitoring and evaluation process can encourage local capacity building for communities. Planning, problem solving, and decision making are all skills that participants can acquire through the participatory monitoring and evaluation process which will help strengthen local capacities. Participants can also learn about the different factors, both internal and external, that ultimately affect the conditions and elements of their program or project, their successes and failures, as well as the potential solutions or alternative action. In addition to learning from experience, participants within participatory monitoring and evaluation also attain the competence to evaluate their own needs, analyze their own priorities and objectives, and undertake action-oriented planning (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998). A fundamental aspect of learning within the participatory monitoring and evaluation process is that stakeholder groups can always reflect on the impact of their evaluation, where it is leading them and what are their failures and accomplishments. Participatory monitoring and evaluation is increasingly seen as a “social process” for people with different needs, opinions and expectations to negotiate. Negotiation is seen as a contribution to building trust among stakeholders and changing their perceptions, behaviors and attitudes, which will ultimately change the way they contribute to the program. Being flexible and willing the experiment are essential components of participatory monitoring and evaluation. Many see the participatory monitoring and evaluation process as ever changing and adapting to different circumstances of whatever the project at hand may be; therefore, there is no specific way or approach to handle participatory monitoring and evaluation. By making the process more responsive and relevant to the needs of the stakeholders, Estrella and Gaventa (1998) argue that flexibility is easily integrated within the design and practice of participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Estrella and Gaventa, also group the variety of experiences in terms of the purposes for which they were being used within the participatory monitoring

and evaluation process, as well as in what kinds of projects and settings. Five general functions were discovered: Impact assessment, project management and planning, organizational strengthening or institutional learning, understanding and negotiating stakeholder perspectives, and public accountability. Evaluating the impact of a program and the changes that have happened as a result is a common function of participatory monitoring and evaluation. The assessment is based on a comparison between the objectives of a program and the achievements that are being made.

Impact assessment can differentiate whether or not the program is (a) achieving their identified goals; whether or not (b) program objectives remain relevant over time; and whether or not (c) the best possible strategies are being employed.

Another purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation is to obtain information in a timely and effective way as to use it for improving project planning and implementation. Different stakeholders use participatory monitoring and evaluation as a management tool to analyze and reflect systematically on their experience, and to be able to plan out their future goals and activities.

Creating a learning process that will help to strengthen organizational and institutional learning is also a big aspect of this participatory monitoring and evaluation process. As an approach to participatory monitoring and evaluation, self-evaluation is a way for people to evaluate the goals of the program themselves and to be able to assess their own organizational capacities. The aim is to allow people to keep track of their progress, by recognizing and solving problems by themselves in order to build and expand on their achievements.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation also allows for an understanding and negotiation of stakeholder perspectives. This process can work in ways that permit people to understand “the views and values they share and work through their differences with others, develop longer-term strategies, take carefully

researched and planned actions which fits their contexts, priorities, and styles of operating". However there are difficulties of resolving conflicting stakeholder opinions, particularly when certain stakeholder groups are powerless when in comparison to others. But that is where the value of this approach lies, in making it possible for stakeholders to speak for themselves.

Finally, with more traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation it was always the donor or government agencies that would hold the beneficiaries and program recipients accountable to the already agreed upon goals and performance targets because they were the ones to identify what was to be monitored and evaluated and how. Participatory monitoring and evaluation grew out of these more conventional approaches and insisted that stakeholders be more engaged in the process of monitoring and evaluation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation holds the stakeholders and beneficiaries accountable, but also allows them to be able to monitor and evaluate the performance of the donor or government agencies. All of these functions of participatory monitoring and evaluation are interdependent and regularly overlap (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998).

Precautions

Before one goes ahead and implements a participatory monitoring and evaluation process, it would be a good idea to consider a few precautions. First, one would want to contemplate whether a participatory approach is appropriate. Having more participants reveals the choice of indicators, methods, analysis, etc., to incorporate more people, all of whom will have different views which mean the whole process will take longer and call for more negotiations. Once that issue is dealt with, other precautions would include deciding who are the best people to involve and how would they contribute. Including someone who has some sort of perspective or knowledge that would also be valuable to the program, for example someone who is reliable and someone who could ensure sustainability of development efforts. Once the right people are selected, they need to be aware

of the time implications that may be present and what their responsibilities are going to be so they will be aware of what they are getting themselves into. Flexibility is also a good thing to have in monitoring and evaluation design as skills improve and people move on, gain or lose interest (Guijt, 1999).

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The following is a compilation of two articles to form a 10-step framework of participatory monitoring and evaluation. However, the steps do not have to necessarily have to be performed in the order they are presented.

1. Define goals, objectives and priorities for monitoring and evaluating.
2. Identify who should and who wants to be involved, these will be the evaluation team members.
3. Establish roles and responsibilities for identified evaluation team members – clarify participants' expectations of the process, and in what way each person or group wants to contribute. Organize and train evaluation team members.
4. Develop framework for the evaluation, agree on the methods, responsibilities and timing of information collected.
5. Develop a set of evaluation questions and data collection instruments.
6. Collect information – conduct interviews/surveys/focus groups etc.
7. Analyze information/data collected and summarize findings.
8. Discuss evaluation findings and agree on how findings are to be used.
9. Formulate and summarize lessons learned from the evaluation process and outcomes. Develop ways to improve the process for next time.
10. Write evaluation report and distribute results via multiple media (presentations, newsletters, web sites, meetings) (Guijt, 2000 and Gilliam, 2002).

Having a plan or framework will help out tremendously when implementing a participatory monitoring and evaluation process. A framework helps you to select your goals, objectives and set priorities, this will establish a clear vision of what you're going to be working towards. One will run into fewer problems if methods are selected beforehand. There are six selected criteria that can be used to check the overall suitability of the methods. They are the following:

- Validity: Do the people who are going to be using the information believe that the method is valid?
- Reliability: Will the method work when needed?
- Relevance: Does the method produce the information required, or is it actually assessing something similar but significantly different?
- Sensitivity: Is it able to pick up data variations sufficiently and be adapted?
- Cost-effectiveness: Is it producing useful information at relatively low cost?
- Timely: Is it likely to avoid delay between information collection, analysis and use? (Guijt, 1999)

It is important for all stakeholders to identify good indicators that will be used to measure progress and to develop a system to continuously collect data and assess progress. The indicators should be:

- Simple: Indicators that are straightforward and clear 'proof' that the project is achieving its objectives.
- Measurable: Either continuously variable indicators that can be measured directly, or yes/no indicators that are either achieved or not achieved.
- Attributable: Changes that are clearly an effect of the project rather than someone else.
- Realistic: The indicators should be realistically achievable within the scale and time-frame of the project, but should still present a challenge.
- Time-bound: Targets that should be reached within a specific time.
- Objective: Not based on subjective opinions (Participatory Approaches).

The process will be more efficient if everyone knows what role they will be playing and how they will contribute. As well, a framework can increase the participants' skills in planning and organization.

Case Study #1 - PARC

Two case studies that both make use of participatory monitoring and evaluation will be discussed. The first is centered on building participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation methods in PARC (The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees). PARC is a Palestinian NGO (non-government organization) that works in agriculture in rural areas of the West Bank and Gaza. They work with both men and women who are poor marginalized farmers to help advance their ability to make a living from farming and to develop a strong Palestinian agricultural sector. Under Israeli military occupation since 1967, both

the West Bank and Gaza's economy has almost become totally dependent upon Israel. They have suffered from a lack of development with poor infrastructure, a negative investment climate, and the restrictions imposed by the military administration. During the intifada (the popular uprising against the occupation) in the late 1980s and early 1990s curfews were imposed and for extended periods of time, movement within or between towns, villages or refugee camps was prevented. Since the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords, a closure has been in force which restricts movement. Total closure was in place for most of 1996. Now, the West Bank and Gaza are a complex patchwork of zones with different degrees of autonomy. The closures, curfews and blockades have had a huge impact on marketing of agricultural produce (Symes and Jasser, 1998).

These circumstances have several implications for agricultural development and the use for participatory methods. The occupation severely limits the control people have over their lives which make them feel helpless to promote change. Together, men, women and children all struggled to support their Palestinian identity and have tried to build a Palestinian nation that would once again give them the control they once had over their own future. Little focus was placed on the development process and the project cycle due to the concentration on emergency work during the intifada. Planning was complicated because of the extremely unpredictable and volatile situation at hand. All of these factors did little to support the progress of participatory monitoring and evaluation. PARC focused on long-term goals, and started on building a sustainable and viable agricultural sector.

By taking part in community or interest groups workshops they found that it was a great way for people to discuss and create ideas about the projects and work, while increasing the effectiveness of their communication. The techniques used in the workshops were designed to support in depth analysis and to develop future directions for the work being done. Usually group activities that were designed specifically for each workshop were done; they

used tools such as key points on cards and ranking for prioritization. They found that when there is a certain degree of individual focus, then participatory monitoring and evaluation can be developed more easily within programs (Symes and Jasser, 1998). When evaluations are carried out for a specific program or project, a team comprised of at least one member from the Consultancy Unit, program, field staff and the community, was set up to lead the process. Community involvement is very important because if you have an outside evaluator come in, what they want can sometimes be very different from the program's aim. For participatory monitoring and evaluation to be successful it involves more than using different methods, it can only work with an understanding of the word participation, and this frequently means improving the skills of the people involved. When more participatory methods were presented the project staff started to see the benefits for themselves and their projects. This involvement allowed them to take the responsibility for the participatory monitoring and evaluation work and see it as a crucial part of the process. After participating in an organizational self-evaluation, the Women's Unit of PARC in Gaza decided to use some of the participatory methods to evaluate their unit's work in more detail. The project cycle is commonly presented as a circle connecting planning, monitoring and evaluation. From experience monitoring and evaluation can be seen as a way of measuring how a plan was implemented. Merely providing suggestion for future actions is not good enough; the cycle must include clear plans about what the next step should be (Symes and Jasser, 1998).

Case Study #2 - CARE

The second case study is about the horrible floods of 1987 and 1988 in Bangladesh. In 1996 CARE Bangladesh began a three-year community based Flood Proofing Pilot (FPP) Project. Their government presented a series of Flood Action Plan (FAP) studies to formulate and implement technically, financially, economically and environmentally sound solutions to the harmful effects of the

floods in Bangladesh. Commonly known as 'flood proofing', it is the provision of long term non-structural or minor structural measures that can be undertaken by individuals, families or communities to alleviate the effects of floods. CARE's Flood Proofing Pilot Project goals were to promote flood proofing as an vital requirement for all development activities in flood prone areas and to show that flood proofing can enhance the social and economic well being of individuals, families and communities (Ara, 1998). The Flood Proofing Pilot Project specifically aims to conserve household and community resources during floods; maintain individual and household physical well being during floods; and to motivate individuals, families and communities, through participatory learning and action techniques, to allow them to sustain improvements in their economic and social livelihood in flood prone environments.

Good planning is critical to ensure people's participation and ownership of flood proofing activities and to enable clear monitoring and evaluation. The project used the methods of participatory rural appraisal for the initial planning of flood proofing measures: transect walks, social mapping, wealth ranking, seasonal diagram, time-line, historical matrix, problem prioritization and semi-structured interview. For five days the project staff stayed in the villages to build a rapport, to develop an appropriate plan with the villagers and to identify the flood related problems. A wide range of flood proofing interventions were identified because each village had different needs. The following were implemented: homestead raising so they're above the flood level; raising grounds of communal places; flood shelter; provision of an evacuation boat; flood proofed water and sanitation system; plant based erosion protection; social forestry; homestead gardening; CAGES - aquaculture for alternative income generation during floods; and flood preparedness and health education.

Each village formed their own village committee called the Local Project Society (LPS) that works for the villages. It is comprised of seven villagers and includes, when possible, a community leader, a teacher or religious leader, a

local social worker and a landless person (someone who has less than 1 acre of land and requires to sell his/her labor) and at least two members should be women. The list of tasks and responsibilities of the LPS is long and various, but after identifying the interventions and the beneficiaries per intervention, the LPS as well as other community members draw visual village plans that portray the flood proofing activities, clearly identifying who is responsible, what the community will contribute and do, and when it will be implemented (Ara, 1998). Since the plan is visualized all of the stakeholders can read and understand the plan and monitor the progress of the implementation. The implementation period is from January to June. During this time the society supervises, monitors payment and makes decisions about hiring labor and process in general. The society meets with the villagers to review and share the visual plan and to take initiatives accordingly.

As for the monitoring and evaluation process, there are three separate sessions in each intervention session. The first session is the ongoing monitoring of the implementation process. The second session, in this example took place in May 1997, where three teams of three people held a five day participatory monitoring and evaluation session for each of the 11 villages that were included in the implementation process. For each village the villagers and the LPS established indicators and how they wanted to evaluate the project. Then the CARE staff and the LPS drew pictures of the indicators and tested them with the villagers. The third session, a participatory impact assessment, was held in November of 1997, which assessed the impact of the whole project during that year. To understand the villagers' experiences of the floods, instead of having emphasis on the total numbers of people involved, they tried to ensure the participation of people from different sections of the village. Using the social map compiled in the planning phase, the LPS committee had to check whether participants represented all sections of the villages. Focus group discussions that were held helped to share the experiences of floods using these visual indicators.

This was a means of assessing the progress that the villages were making towards meeting their indicator objectives. The village sessions led to the identification of new flood proofing measures. Findings from the participatory monitoring and evaluation activities helped to develop replicable and cost-effective methodologies for flood proofing. The participatory monitoring and evaluation activities also guaranteed the project's relevance to the needs of flood prone areas of Bangladesh (Ara, 1998).

Improvements

To make the participatory monitoring and evaluation process even better, after it is implemented there should be an assessment of how to improve it for the next time around. Some of the more common problems that people run into that can be easily improved are the following. The process should be structured in such a way as to capture the interests of all different groups within a community; the process should be easy to facilitate; the process should not be time consuming; non-literate members should be encouraged to participate by being able to use visual and oral forms of communication (Hamilton, 2000); and all discussions should take place using the local language to encourage all members to participate (Alzate, 2000).

Conclusion

As one can see, the social, cultural and political processes that are presented within participatory monitoring and evaluation all play a major role in its definition. Participatory monitoring and evaluation has a way of bringing people together to help them understand one another and to share in decision making. Participatory monitoring and evaluation deviates from more traditional approaches in that its focus is centered around the program stakeholders and their input, instead of an agency that was sent out to do the evaluation. All of the stakeholders need to negotiate to reach a consensus about what to do with the evaluation findings, how to solve problems and how to improve the program's

effectiveness; therefore, more people are actively involved within the whole process.

The four main principles of participatory monitoring and evaluation, participation, learning, negotiation and flexibility, are essential. If even one of these components were missing, participatory monitoring and evaluation would be conducted in a much different way. As for the precautions, although they are not necessary, they will make the whole process run smoother if those issues are dealt with beforehand.

So why would someone choose participatory monitoring and evaluation over more traditional monitoring and evaluation approaches? Participatory monitoring and evaluation contributes to the progress of the participants' learning about the program and its performance; it improves their ability to understand and accept other participant's view points; it improves the evaluation skills of the participants; it enhances teamwork; it builds a commitment that is shared among participants to act on an evaluation recommendation; and participatory monitoring and evaluation increases the chance that evaluation information will be used to improve the performance of the program (Binnendijk, 1996).

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