PRIA

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Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Certificate Programme

International Perspectives in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 3

Method, Tools and Techniques of Monitoring and Evaluation - I

Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

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Introduction

Having got an understanding on the conceptual aspects on monitoring and evaluation, in this unit we shall explore the methodological aspects of monitoring and evaluation. We shall understand various tools and techniques that are used in both information-gathering and analytical aspects of monitoring and evaluation. We shall primarily focus on result-based management (RBM), logical framework analysis (LFA), outcome mapping (OM) and most significant changes (MSC). These tools and techniques are very significant to ensure effective management of development projects.

Learning Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be:

- Familiar with the concept and process of various methods, tools and techniques of monitoring and evaluation; and
- Will be able to analyse and apply them in different contexts.

3.1 Result-based Management (RBM)

Every development intervention starts with a purpose. A set of actions must be performed to generate certain outputs, which will, in turn, lead to changes or attainment of the purpose. The process or strategy of focusing on performance and achievement of outputs and results is referred to as result-based management (RBM).

RBM reflects the way an organization applies processes and resources to undertake interventions to achieve commonly agreed results. It is a broad management strategy to change the way organizations operate, by improving their performance, programmatic focus and delivery, and strengthen management effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. It helps move the focus of programming, managing and decision-making from inputs and processes to the objectives to be met. RBM is a participatory and team-based approach to programme planning and focuses on achieving defined and measurable results and impacts. During the implementation phase, the RBM approach helps to ensure and monitor that all available financial, human and institutional resources continue to support the intended results (UNESCO, 2011).

3.1.1 Process

RBM at the *planning stage* articulates clear, expected results and also planning strategies, activities, time lines and resources (financial, human and material) to achieve these results. The results in the project context are *outputs, outcomes* and *impacts*. It is essential to first specify the needs to be answered, analyse who will benefit from the intervention and with whom to work with, taking into account the resources available, in order to define the results to be attained.

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Steps in RBM

RBM at *planning stage* consists of the following steps:

1. Identifying the outcomes and expected results to which the activity or project will contribute. ensures that the activity is placed in a logical relationship, so as to adequately contribute to the attainment of the results defined at the higher levels.

2. Indicating the specific issues to be addressed by an intervention via a needs assessment.
3. Formulating expected results in clear and measurable terms.

4. Defining performance indicators and benchmarks per expected result, specifying what is to be measured.

5. Identifying the key stakeholders involved and concerned, such as the target/beneficiary groups and partners.

6. Estimating the resources available such as staff (all types of contracts including consultants and interns) and budget.

7. Developing a strategy for implementation and the attainment of results indicating how one will proceed to go from the current situation to the expected one.

Source: (UNESCO 2007).

RBM at the *implementation stage* implements the project from the point of view of the results and not just simply performing activities or utilising the budget. The implementation phase includes three functions: monitoring, reprogramming and evaluation.

Monitoring is part and parcel of the RBM approach as it helps to determine if the project is on track or not, and if the expected result has been achieved. The function of monitoring is to compare the programme information with the actual situation: what is the difference between what was decided and what is actually being done?

When monitoring, one assesses results, in a specific time period, with reference to the performance indicator(s) and benchmark(s), the partners involved, the beneficiaries impacted, the team dedicated to the activity and the budget spent.

Reprogramming takes place if an event has hindered the implementation of an element. It implies reviewing, adjusting the programme information to the new situation and being accountable for it. An activity created during the implementation phase is an example of reprogramming.

Evaluation is an opportunity to learn more about the programme activities and to take corrective measures if necessary. The lessons learned are integrated into future programming, improving the organization's programme delivery (UNESCO, 2011).

RBM at the *monitoring and evaluation (monitoring and evaluation) stage* implies that the purpose of the monitoring and evaluation is to give feedback on the achievement of results or lack of them, analysing the reasons for the same, and drawing, learning and making decisions on strategy to ensure achievement of results. Identification of what data has to be collected (indicators) is a first step in developing the monitoring framework performance measurement. Several methods and tools in data collection include interview, focus group discussions, participatory rural appraisal, rating and ranking exercise, etc. Analysis of the data collected is a critical aspect in monitoring and evaluation. monitoring and evaluation is customised to look into results and to measure progress towards achieving the developmental results. The performance informs the management about the progress made along the results chain as well as identifying programme strengths and weaknesses in order to take corrective action. *Are we achieving the developmental results for target beneficiaries at a reasonable cost?* The three most commonly used evaluation/analysis tools and techniques are cost benefit analysis (CBA), SWOT analysis and value-based analysis.

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Cost-benefit Analysis

Cost-benefit (CB) Analysis is a tool used to compare, in monetary terms, the actual or estimated costs and the benefits associated with a project or programme. Bringing people together to create a list of the costs and benefits associated with their project, programme, or other activities, can stimulate thinking for future plans. Determining the social, economic, ecological, governance and learning implications of a programme, for example, can help evaluate its sustainability. Comparing costs and benefits can also help projects make decisions around 'trade-offs'; costs that those involved are willing to incur in order to help the achievement of certain benefits, or risks people are willing to take in order to meet the stated objectives.

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is a more nuanced evaluation tool. SWOT is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The first two are a basic inventory of what has been done well and areas in need of improvement.

The last two take up the external environment. Opportunities can include potential sources of funding, partnerships with other organizations, or building allegiances with people in positions of power or influence (such as academia, the media or politicians). Threats can emerge from the politico-economic climate, organizations with competing goals and ideologies, or changing community demographics, or even climate change. Taking account of external opportunities and threats is sometimes referred to as an 'environmental scan'.

The process of carrying out a SWOT analysis can be as simple as a brainstorming meeting, or a longer-term research endeavour, depending on the time and resources available. Going through a SWOT analysis can promote the sharing of information and aids thinking about ways to capitalize on the strengths and deal with weaknesses. While projects and organisations do not necessarily have control over many aspects of the external environment, knowing the opportunities and threats can help them to be aware of, and more prepared to deal with, the pressures they exert.

Value-based Analysis

Techniques for recognising stakeholder values, including those of programme beneficiaries and participants, are increasingly being incorporated into evaluation processes. The process of collectively stating values, for example, ‘community connectedness, ‘social justice’, ‘critical curiosity’, ‘learning’, ‘openness to risk’ and ‘children's well-being’, should occur before a project is initiated, so that stakeholders can return to them at decision points throughout project implementation. Stating values can also be an iterative process, where new values are added as stakeholders learn from their successes and mistakes. When values are listed at the beginning of a project, they can become indicators of success.

3.2 Logical Framework Analysis (LFA)

The logical framework analysis (LFA) is an approach used in the design, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. It is concerned with the *planning procedures* of problem analysis, the development of objectives and indicators, and identification risks and assumptions, which feed into the overall programme plan. Ideally speaking, the process of programme planning should be a participatory one, involving a wide range of stakeholders to reach a consensus on a programme of work; this may then be summarized in a *logical framework* (Insideout, 2010).

The logical framework is used to conceptualize projects by asking some fundamental questions of key stakeholders that is, funders, programme/project delivery partners and beneficiaries, such as:

- Why are we undertaking this programme/project?
- What results do we expect to achieve for the resources being invested?
- Who will the programme/project reach out to in terms of beneficiaries?
- How can the programme/project be best implemented?

3.2.1 Log Frame Matrix

The log frame matrix (LFM) is a convenient way of setting out the design elements of a project. Every project, programme, organization or policy will have a hierarchy or chain of aims, actions and results, which link the problem or need being addressed with the desired solution or satisfaction. The full chain looks like this:

Inputs → ***Activities*** → ***Outputs*** → ***Outcomes*** → ***Impact***

There are three dimensions to the results' chain which can be helpful in articulating output, outcome and impact statements.

- The first is the **timeframe,** where outputs are considered to be short-term results, while outcomes and impact correspond to medium- and long-term results respectively. Outcomes can be achieved throughout the programme/project lifetime, while impacts manifest themselves well after termination.

- The other dimension is the **programme/project reach**. The outcomes of a project with a small budget and a short (one-year) term would certainly not be the same as those of a five-year project in the same sector and country.

- The third important dimension of the results' chain is the **depth of change.** This refers to the depth of change in human development at either the individual, institutional, sectoral or societal levels expected by the programme/project stakeholders. The expected depth of change must be in balance with the resources available and the extent of the intended reach. (Chaturvedi, 2009).

The log frame links the sequence of the results' chain to the indicators for each step, to 'means of verification' (that is, how it will be known, through monitoring, that the indicators at each level in the chain are being achieved) and the risks and assumptions identified in planning that apply at each level. The LFM is illustrated below.

Table 1 Logical Framework Matrix

Narrative summary	**Objectively verifiable indicators**	**Means of verification**	**Assumptions and risks**
Goal - the overall aim to which the project is expected to contribute	Measures – direct or indirect – to show the project's contribution to the goal	Sources of information and methods used to show fulfilment of the goal	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, necessary for maintaining progress towards the goal
Objectives – the new situation which the	Measures -- direct or indirect -- to show the	Sources of information and methods used to	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's

project is aiming to bring about	progress being made towards reaching the objectives	show progress against objectives	control, which are necessary if achieving the objectives is going to contribute towards the overall goal
Outputs – the results which should be within the control of the project management	Measures -- direct or indirect -- to show if project outputs are being delivered	Sources of information and methods used to show delivery of outputs	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, which are necessary if producing the outputs is going to help achieve the objectives
Activities – the things which have to be done by the project to produce the outputs	Measures (direct or indirect) to show if project outputs are being delivered	Sources of information and methods used to show that activities have been completed	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, which are necessary, if completing activities will produce the required outputs
Inputs	Resources – type and level of resources needed for the project. Finance – overall Budget Time – planned start and end date		

Source: Bakewell, Adams and Pratt (2003).

3.2.2 Process

Step 1: Define the overall goal to which the project contributes

The goal helps explain why a programme or project is being undertaken. Sometimes the term ‘goal’ is used to refer to the high level direct results that a programme or project is contributing towards. ‘Vision’ is sometimes used in place of goal.

Step 2: Define the purpose to be achieved by the project

Purpose is a summary statement of what the programme or project should achieve given its timeframe and resources – i.e. the overall outcome.

Step 3: Define outputs for achieving the purpose

The outputs are direct services or products that must be delivered for the outcomes to be realised. Key results or several levels of results are used interchangeably with 'output'.

Step 4: Define activities for achieving each output

Specific *activities* need to be undertaken for the outputs to be produced or outcomes/results/objectives to be realised, for example, conducting a training workshop on collaborative management. Generally one should aim to provide a brief summary of three to seven activities that toned to be implemented in order to accomplish each *output*.

Step 5: Verify the vertical logic with if/then test

The logical framework's structure is based on the concept of cause and effect. If something occurs or is achieved, then something else will be a result of that action. By definition, each project described by a logical framework is based on this if/then or cause and effect logic. At the lowest level of a well-planned logical framework we can say that if certain activities are carried out we can expect certain outputs as results. There should be the same logical relationship between the outputs and the purpose, and between the purpose and the goal. As an example, we could argue that if we achieve the output to supply farmers with improved seed then the purpose of increased production will be seen.

Step 6: Define the assumptions related to each level

Assumptions are statements about the uncertainty factors which may affect the link between each level of objectives. These may be external factors which cannot be controlled in the implementation of the project or those which the project chooses not to control. We can determine the assumptions by asking, 'what conditions must exist in addition to our objective [at activity, output, purpose or goal levels] in order to achieve the next level?' The more important and more risky the assumption, the greater the need to consider (a) redesigning the project; (b) seeking to reduce the risk by internalising the problem; and (c) preparing a contingency plan just in case the worst happens.

Step 7: Define the Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)

OV Indicators demonstrate results. As performance measures, they tell us how to recognize successful accomplishment of objectives. They are not the conditions necessary to achieve those results. There is no cause and effect relationship. But they define, in detail, the performance levels required by objectives in the narrative summary column. Ideally, very few indicators required to clarify what must be accomplished to satisfy the objective are stated in narrative summary. The basic principle of the OVI column is that **'if we can measure it, we can manage it'**. The OVI design starts from a goal then moves to purpose, then on to output, and finally to the activity level. ***Specific purpose indicators*** are the indicators of change/benefits at the level of the target population. Often it is necessary to use proxy indicators since it is either difficult or impossible to measure the change directly. ***Output-level indicators*** in the short run, are very specific targets and in the long run, are indicative of the scope and scale of achievements required. ***Activity-level indicators*** are usually broken down according to who is responsible for implementation. Progress can be monitored against the associated budget and the schedule.

Step 8: Define the Means of Verification (MoV)

In the means of verification (MoV) we describe the sources of information that will demonstrate what has been accomplished. If our objective is 'Farmer income raised by 20 per cent in 2012', where will we get the information to demonstrate this has happened? If we decide that a survey is needed, then we may need to add some action steps to the activities list. If this costs money, we must add this to the budget. The rule is that the indicators we choose for measuring our objectives must be verifiable by some means. If they are not, we must find another indicator.

Step 9: Check the log frame with donor requirement

Each donor has his or her own requirements. Thus, before it is finalised, the LFA needs to be cross-checked with the guidelines given by the specific donor.

Step 10: Review the log frame design in view of previous experience

We should think about previous experiences of projects throughout the preparation of the logical framework. Now is the time to make a final check on this.

3.2.3 Advantages

The LFA is useful throughout the project management cycle in:

- Designing projects in a systematic and logical way, identifying assumptions and risks.
- Implementing projects through effective and efficient use of resources, and managing risks identified in the project design.
- Monitoring progress by identifying indicators of critical and sensitive economic, social and environmental impacts.

3.2.4 Limitations

The logical framework approach provides an excellent tool for project design, but it also has a number of limitations, for example,

- It rarely produces good results if it has not been preceded by a thorough situation analysis in the field, including stakeholder analysis.
- While it has the potential to involve participants, LFA can easily set up an impractical or unrealistic problem/objective framework, depending on the representativeness (or not) of the participants.
- It may be difficult to get consensus on what the project priorities should be.
- Problem analysis can be difficult in cultures where it is inappropriate to discuss problems.
- The logical framework structure is based on a linear view of change, whereas change in the real world is complex, often involving different interacting parallel processes, as well as iterative and cyclic processes.
- Log frames do not readily enable monitoring of unintended consequences.
- LFA analysis is very time-consuming, and requires a substantial commitment from the project team, stakeholders and project partners.
- There is a danger that the process of developing a logical framework together with stakeholders can raise unrealistic expectations beyond what the project can actually deliver. In addition, because of the thoroughness of the problem analysis, the LFA approach can lead to idealistic over-planning if the project design team leader or facilitator does not sufficiently emphasise realism and likely budgetary limits. This is probably the greatest danger of the logical framework approach.

THINK TANK

Using Table 1 as your matrix, identify any development project details and develop a log frame matrix for it.

3.3 Outcome Mapping (OM)

Outcome mapping (OM) is an monitoring and evaluation tool developed by IDRC. It refers to a set of tools and guidelines that steer project or programme teams through an iterative process to identify their desired change and to work collaboratively to achieve it. Results are measured by the changes in behaviour, actions and relationships of those individuals, groups or organisations with whom the initiative is working directly and seeking to influence (Jones and Hearn, 2009).

OM is based on principles of participation and purposefully includes those implementing the programme in the design and data collection so as to encourage ownership and use of findings. It is intended to be used as a consciousness-raising, consensus-building, and empowerment tool for those working directly in development programmes. It introduces monitoring and evaluation considerations at the planning stage of a programme. It moves away from the notion that monitoring and evaluation are done to a programme, and, instead, actively engages the team in the design of a monitoring framework and evaluation plan and promotes self-assessment.

3.3.1 The Underlying Principles

Four guiding principles underpin the OM framework.

Actor-centred development and behaviour change: OM recognises that people and organisations drive change processes. The problem to be tackled, the aims of the project and the indicators of success are defined in terms of changes in behaviour of these actors. Understanding and influencing change requires engaging with these actors, their role, their relationships, their mind-sets and motivations. This is crucial, as they have different visions and perceptions of change. OM is sensitive to this, allowing different actors to explore their own perspectives.

1. ***Continuous learning and flexibility***: OM emphasises that the most effective planning, monitoring and evaluation activities are cyclical, iterative and reflexive. They aim to foster learning about the actors, contexts and challenges involved in influencing social change. OM enables this learning to feed back into adaptations to the project as it proceeds, and can be used by project partners to influence their actions.

2. ***Participation and accountability:*** By involving stakeholders and partners in the PME process and emphasising reflection on relationships and responsibilities, participation incorporates valuable perspectives and fosters a two-way accountability.

3. ***Non-linearity and contribution, not attribution and control***: With OM, processes of transformation and change are owned collectively; they are not the result of a causal chain beginning with 'inputs' and controlled by donors, but of a complex web of interactions between different actors, forces and trends. To produce sustainable changes, projects should contribute to and influence these processes of social change, rather than focusing on controlling specific outcomes and claiming attribution. A more honest approach can generate a more meaningful picture of the actual contribution and role of a project/programme in achieving results (Jones and Hearn, 2009).

The methodology shifts away from assessing the development impact of a programme (for example, in terms of policy relevance, poverty alleviation, or reduced conflict) toward changes in the behaviours, relationships, actions or activities of the people, groups, and organizations with whom a development programme works directly. This shift significantly alters the way a programme understands its goals and assesses its performance and results. OM establishes a vision of the human, social, and environmental betterment to which the programme hopes to contribute and then focuses monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within that programme's direct sphere of influence.

The programme's contributions to development are planned and assessed based on its influence on the partners with whom it is working to effect change. At its essence, development is accomplished by, and for, people.

For example, a programme's objective may be to provide communities with access to cleaner water by installing purification filters. Traditionally, the method of evaluating the results of this programme would be to count the number of filters installed and measure changes in the level of contaminants in the water before and after the filters were installed. Focus on changes in behaviour begins instead from the premise that water does not remain clean without people being able to maintain its quality over time. The programme's outcomes are therefore evaluated in terms of whether those responsible for water purity in the communities not only have, but use, the appropriate tools, skills, and knowledge to monitor the contaminant levels, change filters, or bring in experts when required. OM provides a method for development programmes to plan for and assess the capacities that they are helping to build in the people, groups, and organisations who will ultimately be responsible for improving the well-being of their communities. It does not attempt to replace the more traditional forms of evaluation, which focus on changes in conditions or in the state of well-being. Instead, it supplements other forms of evaluation by focusing specifically on related behavioural change (Earl, Carden and Smutylo, 2001).

3.3.2 Key Terms in Outcome Mapping

Vision

The vision reflects the broad human, social and environmental betterment in which the programme is engaged and to which it is contributing.

Mission

The mission statement describes in a broad way the contribution of the donor programme to the vision. It describes how the programme intends to operationalise its role in support of the vision and support the achievement of outcomes by its partners, and how it will remain effective, efficient, relevant and sustainable.

Boundary Partners

Boundary partners are individuals, groups or organisations with whom the project or programme interacts directly and whom it hopes to influence. It is in the boundary partners that behaviour changes (outcomes) are expected.

Contributions

The programme, by using OM, focuses on its contributions to outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, enhance the possibility of development impacts but the relationship is not necessarily a direct one of cause and effect.

Progress Markers

Progress markers indicate changes beyond the programme's own practices, that is, interaction with boundary partners. They are not used for assessing failure or success, but for learning and reflection. The indicators are classified as ***expect to see***, ***like to see*** and ***love to see.***

Expect to see means the minimum changes that the project would expect among the boundary partners. ***Like to see*** is one level higher and would be achieved if the project was having an influence on boundary partners. ***Love to see*** is the most profound type of change that a project would achieve. This would happen if the project was successful. The progress markers are written clearly as behaviour change statements.

For example, the project ***expects to see*** farmers establish nurseries of planting materials. The project would ***like to see*** farmers establish market networks. The project would ***love to see*** farmers start their own income generating schemes.

Support Strategies

Support strategies define the approaches of the project/programme as to how to work with partners. They are the basis for elaborating work plans and assessing the performance of the project. Activities are planned and can be monitored along the work plans. Organizational practices help to build 'organizational development' matters into the project team. Projects allocate resources (time and money) to remain relevant and innovative. System borders must be drawn; however, without neglecting that the 'defined system' is interacting with a wider world. The system border is reflected in the vision, where a description of the changed behaviour of key stakeholders (change agents, decision-makers, policy-makers etc.) and the expected change for the ultimate beneficiaries are related (impact hypotheses).

Organisational Practices

Organisational practices describe the efforts of the project team in order to remain innovative, efficient and relevant for the programme purpose.

3.3.3 Process

The OM Framework is based on a vision, a mission statement (formulated for the project respective donor programme) and outcome challenges (statements formulated by boundary partners describing their roles, responsibilities and aims, responsibility for these changes lies with the partners).

OM process is divided into three stages.

The first stage, ***Intentional Design***, helps a programme establish consensus on the macro level, changes it will help to bring about and plan the strategies it will use.

It helps answer four questions: Why? (vision statement); Who? (boundary partners); How? (mission -contribution of programme to change process; strategy maps, organizational strategy); and What? (changes sought - outcome challenges, progress markers).

The second stage, ***Outcome and Performance Monitoring***, provides a framework for the on-going monitoring of the programme's actions and boundary partners' progress toward the achievement of outcomes. It is based largely on systematised self-assessment and a set of data collection tools.

The third stage, ***Evaluation Planning***, helps the programme identify evaluation priorities and develop an evaluation plan.

3.3.4 Advantages

- When working in partnership, OM helps to clarify the roles of different stakeholders – beneficiaries, partners, strategic allies or implementers – letting them explore the most relevant (and sustainable) set of activities on which to focus. OM ensures that projects and programmes work through local partners and institutions, rather than through parallel structures. Its process supports the partners in assuming responsibility and clarifies the end of project status at the very beginning (that is, includes the exit strategy during the planning phase).
- OM fosters ownership and commitment and enables more sustainable change by unifying the visions and coordinating the work of multiple actors.
- Learning from experiences and coping with change are the key elements of OM. Accountability issues (in all directions) and learning purposes are held in a balance.
- OM is particularly useful where the focus is on human-centred development and the actors are involved, rather than technical and scientific factors.

- OM is ideal for projects where capacity building is (or should be) an important aspect. Capacity building is a complex process, and it can be difficult to produce meaningful monitoring data. By presenting the overarching objective as a series of progressive behaviour changes of the actors involved, programme staff can track progress towards the goal and learn as they work.

- OM is well suited to guide projects facing complex problems: where there are a number of interconnected issues, where progress relies on the interactions of many different actors, and where causality and future changes are hard to forecast. By integrating learning and reflection, and highlighting the need for projects to be flexible and adapt to lessons learned as they go along, the OM framework puts in place processes to help address such large challenges.

- OM developed in response to the increasing need for greater learning and reflection within development programmes – a need that was not met through the existing PME approaches. It encourages the building of the space that project teams and partners need to reflect on their progress. While this is always valuable, there are times when it is the top priority. In these cases, OM can be a very powerful communication tool, ensuring better knowledge management and understanding among team members and partners (Roduner et al, 2008).

3.3.5 Limitations

- Limited systematic analysis of OM: As a recent method there are no systematic studies of its effectiveness and efficiency to date. Existing reports and articles are based on observations, and the accompanying examples or empirical evidence is often criticised as not well founded.

- New meaning for existing terms can create misunderstandings. OM makes use of terms that are already used with other connotations in other areas (for example, ‘vision’ and ‘mission’ in organizational development).

- OM explicitly requires that project structures and activities constantly adapt to the changing context. Under these conditions standardised planning tools such as milestones and outcome challenges may not make much sense (Roduner et al, 2008).

Think Tank
Prepare progress markers as an outcome mapping exercise for the same development project outlined to you for developing LFM in section 3.4.

3.4 Most Significant Change (MSC)

The most significant change (MSC) method is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sort of changes to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the programme cycle and provides information to help people manage the programme. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the program as a whole.

MSC has had several names since it was conceived, each emphasising a different quality. It is an emerging technique and has already acquired many adaptations. Examples are: 'monitoring without indicators' – MSC does not make use of predefined indicators, especially ones which have to be counted and measured; or the 'story approach' – the answers to the central question about change are often in the form of stories of who did what, when and why, and the reasons the event was important (Davies & Dart, 2001).

MSC was developed by Rick Davies in 1995 as part of the monitoring and evaluation of a rural development programme in Bangladesh. This relatively new method is based on a qualitative, participatory approach, with stakeholders involved in all aspects of the evaluation and is therefore a shift away from conventional quantitative, expert-driven evaluation methods toward a qualitative participant-driven approach, focusing on the human impact of interventions.

3.4.1 Process

The process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most important of these by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by 'searching' for project impact.

Once the changes have been captured, people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of the reported changes. When the technique is successfully implemented, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on the programme impact. The ten steps usually included are:

- **Raising interest at the start:** The first step in MSC generally involves introducing a range of stakeholders to MSC and fostering interest in and commitment to participating.

- **Defining the domains of change to be monitored**: This involves selected stakeholders identifying broad domains, for example, 'changes in people's lives', which are not precisely defined as are performance indicators, but deliberately left to be defined by the actual users. For example, the participants in MSC may be asked to look for significant changes in four domains:

    - Changes in the quality of people's lives
    - Changes in the nature of people's participation in development activities
    - Changes in the sustainability of people's organisations and activities
    - Any other changes

- **Defining the reporting period:** This step is to decide how frequently to monitor changes taking place in the domains of change. The frequency of collection of SC stories varies from fortnightly to yearly. The most common frequency has probably been three monthly, coinciding with the prevalence of quarterly reporting in many organizations. Low frequency reporting runs the risk of staff and project participants both forgetting how the MSC process works, or why it is being used.

Frequent reporting may lead to the exhaustion of known cases of longer-term significant change and a focus on the shorter-term significant changes that can be identified. Frequent reporting also increase the cost of the process, in terms of the amount of participants' time taken up by the process.

- **Collecting SC stories:** SC stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are gathered by asking a simple question such as: "during the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the programme". It is initially up to respondents to allocate a domain category to their stories. In addition to this, respondents are encouraged to report why they consider a particular change to be the most significant.

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The question, directed to the participants to gather their significant stories, as: "looking back over the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the programme" has six parts:

- *'Looking back over the last month…'* refers to a specific time period.
- *'…in your opinion...'* suggests that the participants exercise their own judgement.
- *'…the most significant …'* asks the participants to be selective, not to try to comment on everything, but to focus in and report on one thing.
- *'…change…'* asks the participants to be more selective, to report a change rather than static aspects of the situation or something that was present in the previous reporting period.
- *'…for participants…'* asks the participants to be even more selective, not to report just any change but a change in the quality of people's lives.
- *' …in the programme?'* Like the first part of the sentence, this establishes some boundaries.

- **Selecting the most significant stories:** In this step, the most significant stories are selected, analysed and filtered through different levels of authority within any organisation or programme. Each level of the hierarchy reviews a series of stories sent to them by the level below and selects the single most significant account of change within each domain. Each group then sends the selected stories up to the next level of the programme hierarchy, and the number of stories is whittled down through a systematic and transparent process. Every time stories are selected, the criteria used to select them are recorded and fed back to all interested stakeholders, so that each subsequent round of story collection and selection is informed by feedback from previous rounds. The organisation is effectively recording and adjusting the direction of its attention and the criteria it uses for valuing the events it sees there.

- **Feeding back the results of the selection process:** A document is produced which includes all stories selected at the uppermost organizational level in each domain of change over a given period. The stories are accompanied by the reasons for selection. The programme funders are asked to assess the stories in the document and select those which best represent the sort of outcomes they wish to fund. They are also asked to document the reasons for their choice. This information is fed back to project managers.

- **Verifying the stories:** The selected stories are verified by visiting the sites where the described events had taken place. The purpose of this is two-fold: to check that stories have been reported accurately and honestly and to provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about events seen as especially significant. If conducted sometime after the event, a visit also offers a chance to see what has happened since the event was first documented.

- **Quantification:** The next step is quantification, which can take place at two stages. When an account of change is first described, it is possible to include quantitative information as well as qualitative information. It is also possible to quantify the extent to which the most significant changes identified in one location have taken place in other locations within a specific period.

- **Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring:** The next step after quantification is monitoring the monitoring system itself, which can include looking at who participated and how they affected the contents, and analysing how often different types of changes are reported.
- **Revising the system:** In this step the system is revised based on the findings of the MSC process (ODI, 2009).

3.4.2 Advantages

- It is a good means of identifying unexpected changes.
- It clearly identifies the values that prevail in an organization and to have a practical discussion about which of those values is the most important. This happens when people think through and discuss which of the SCs is the most significant. This can happen at all level of the organization.
- It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events they think were important.
- It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
- It can build staff capacity in analysing data and conceptualising impact.
- It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organisational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.
- It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

- The focus is on learning rather than accountability. This means that the evaluation managers, as well as the field workers are forced to reflect on and openly question the intervention programme and their interactions with the community in which the intervention takes place.

- It is also able to inform other monitoring and evaluation processes, identifying the significant aspects of the intervention to allow for more quantitative evaluation processes. In addition, the process gives the evaluators a heightened sensitivity to the beneficiaries, which, it could be argued, is more conducive to successful outcomes.

3.4.3 Limitations

Although the impact of the evaluation emerges in stories gathered from the community and other stakeholders, only certain individuals can be part of the story generation process. It is inevitable that some stories will not be considered and that the stories may not necessarily be representative of the entire community's feelings.

The significant stories of marginalised and under-represented people within a society may differ from the less marginalised people. The community members may not understand the concept of a significant change story, which may either lead to generation of irrelevant information or the generation of socially desirable stories.

Summary

We explored RBM, LFA, OM and MSC in PME and understood its significance in effective management of development projects. For instance, RBM in PME implies that the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to give feedback on the achievement of results or lack of it, analysing the reasons for the same, and drawing, learning and making decisions on strategy to ensure achievement of results. LFA enables identification of indicators to monitor and evaluate critical and sensitive development impacts. OM focuses on planning, monitoring and evaluating behaviour change in the lives of people who are to be influenced by the project. MSC monitors and evaluates bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

Recommended Readings

- Bakewell, O., Adams, J., & Pratt, B. (2003). *Sharpening the development process: A practical guide to monitoring and evaluation*. Oxford: INTRAC.

- Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). *The 'most significant change' (MSC) technique: A guide to its use*. Retrieved from www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

- Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). *Outcome mapping: Building, learning and reflection into development programmes*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.

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