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**Appreciation Programme**

**Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Education  
Programmes**

**Module – IV**

**Emerging Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Education  
Programmes**

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**Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Education Programmes**

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## **Modules of Appreciation Programme on Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Education Programmes**

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## Introduction and Objectives

### Introduction

Most field projects on adult education do integrate some aspects and elements of monitoring of activities, so that planned programmes are delivered within the time and budget available. However, systematic evaluation of overall project achievements and end-of-the-project impacts on the lives of the learners, their families and the community that they live in, is not a very common practice. Evaluation also poses certain challenges as measuring impacts and assessing changes in the lives of learners and communities is a complex task. However, in order that relevance and effectiveness of adult education projects can be established and sustained, it is imperative that systematic impact assessments are carried out regularly, as this is the only way that sustainability of adult education programmes can be taken forward.

The lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of adult learning and education at macro societal levels reflects a clear need for a more coherent approach. Most programmes make no reference at all to the evaluation of adult education, except in cases where donors have demanded it. The development of indicators and identification of benchmarks remain under developed and much work needs to be done in this area, given the fact that there is a burgeoning need to monitor and evaluate education programmes, in order that lessons learnt can be applied to future plans and policies (UNESCO, 1997).

## **Objectives**

- To understand and appreciate the intricacies of evaluating long term impacts of an adult education project.
- To recognise practical challenges faced in any monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts and strategic ways to address them.
- To explore importance of mainstreaming M&E by enabling participation, ownership and empowerment of learners

## **Unit 1: Evaluating Impacts**

The previous modules have concentrated on the monitoring aspect of monitoring and evaluation. The prime focus of M&E is looking at the project inputs and outputs, with a view to assess progress of the project implementation and making necessary adjustments to reach the intended goals and objectives. The evaluation of a project is concerned with the assessment of overall accomplishments of the larger programme objectives.

This section will now focus on the role of evaluation in a programme.

Evaluation is an assessment of achievement of a project's overall purposes.

The key questions to be kept in mind when undertaking or planning evaluation are very similar to the ones asked when monitoring a project:

- Why is it needed?
- Who requires it?
- How will the results be used?
- What are the objectives of evaluation?
- What is the information needed?
- Who can provide this information?
- What indicators can be used to measure impact and progress?
- How would the information be collected?
- How will the findings be recorded and presented?
- How will conclusions be drawn from these findings?
- How can the results be used in the future when planning for similar projects?

## 1.1 Types of Evaluation

In practice, there are several forms of evaluation and these are utilized based on what is to be evaluated and by whom. These include:

**Participatory Self-Evaluation:** In participatory self-evaluation, all the parties, including the communities, are involved in assessing the impacts of the programme. This form is particularly useful while the next phase of the programme is to be planned. This is so, because participatory self-evaluation vests in the people, a sense of ownership and responsibility of its findings, as well as direction to the next phase of the programme.

- **Independent Evaluation:** This is conducted by external facilitators. It is important to note that evaluation must not be restricted to only the learners and the programme but should be extended to look at the work of fieldworkers, trainers and programme managers, amongst other stakeholders. Very often, such externally conducted independent evaluations are required by donors.
- In practice, a combination of participatory self-evaluation and externally conducted evaluations can yield complementary and rich set of findings.
- Evaluations can also be categorized on the basis of when they are conducted. Thus, they can be any one of the following:
  - **Terminal Evaluation:** This is done at the end of the project, to analyse learning from the experience and to make use of lessons next phase of the specific project being evaluated or for new future.
  - **Ex-post Evaluation:** These are usually undertaken after a certain period of time after the project has ended, in order to judge long-term impacts and/or sustainability of the programme.

## **1.2 Purpose of Evaluations**

Evaluation of various programmes can help stakeholders better understand various aspects of the programme. They can be utilized to gain perspective on issues such as:

### **Effectiveness of the Project**

Any project is aimed at certain objectives - both in the immediate future and in the long run. The process of evaluation can look at whether the project has achieved its short term goals, as well as help the beneficiaries in ensuring that the project has a qualitative effect on their lives.

### **Efficiency**

Evaluation also helps in tallying the achieved results with the money that has been invested. This would give information on whether the amount that is spent is justified or not. Findings would also help in reviewing the programme and making necessary changes, in case the envisaged benefits are not being achieved.

### **Relevance**

Evaluation helps in knowing whether a particular project is useful for a particular community or not. For example, adult education programmes, one can look at whether or not, a course goes beyond provision of certificates or degrees, in bringing about a change and improvement in the life of the learner. Evaluation moves beyond assessing information sharing and knowledge enhancement, to examine the efficacy of the project in terms of the real needs of the people and in improving the quality of their lives.



## **Sustainability**

No programme can truly change lives of people if it is not sustainable. Therefore, it cannot hope to achieve long term change if the focus is only on short term benefits. An effective adult education programme should provide real life skills that would build confidence, ensure efficiency in daily transactions, improve negotiation skills and even better employment prospects.

## **Unanticipated Effects**

Most projects are bound to have unintended consequences, which could be either positive or negative. The process of evaluation must analyse the causes for these effects and also look at new problems and constraints that might have been ignored earlier, or may have arisen out of these unanticipated effects. One of the purposes of the evaluation is to also build strategies to counter negative impacts or consciously integrate elements that provide for positive results.

## **Project Management**

Finally, M&E can also look into the management of the entire project. This would also include examining various aspects of communication between the various stakeholders and whether the beneficiaries have had a say in such communications. The relationship that exists between the various stakeholders would affect the level of acceptance and, eventually, the outcome of the programme.

### **1.3 Assessing Impacts of the Project**

Measuring impacts of a project is meaningful only after some time has elapsed since the end of project implementation. Long-term impacts are meant to justify the project. A positive impact would lead to improvements in the life conditions of the intended beneficiaries.

In the context of the example from the WELLD project that has been referred to in the previous Modules, we can make a clear distinction between a desired output and a meaningful impact. Provision of literacy skills to the women in the project is an achievement, a desired output. But to convert this into a positive outcome of the programme can be achieved only when there is betterment in the quality lives of the women in the project. Thus, an impact goes beyond the fulfillment of basic goals of the programme.

In measuring such impacts, the evaluation exercise also has to keep its focus on certain unintended consequences of the project. For example, women attending literacy classes in the WELLD project may as a result become involved activities that earn them additional income. However, this may lead them to not get the required rest and get over-stressed – a negative impact. But such unintended outcomes may also be positive and status of women within their families and the community goes up because they are now functionally literate and earning higher income. It is also possible that these two unintended outcomes both positive and negative co-exist and it therefore becomes important to assess and strategize the best ways to deal with such situations.

It is important that evaluation be planned in a systematic manner, or it may run the risk of being perceived as a threat to the stakeholders. All involved should be in agreement on the undertaking of an evaluation exercise and treat it as a learning opportunity rather than a 'fault finding' mission. It should also be presented in a non-threatening manner, encouraging sharing of experiences and views of all, in an attempt to understand the process of the project and the change that it has brought about at the level of individuals, their families and the community they live in.

Since evaluation takes a considerable amount of time and effort, it is important that it not treated like as a random exercise. Follow up action should be developed at the level of the community, at the level of the NGOs involved in conducting the project and at the level of donors.

It is integral to discuss the results of the evaluation with each of the stakeholders, and get their opinion on the changes that should be made in the next phase of the programme. Such as step, is critical also to make the process inclusive of all the stakeholders and allow better communication between them.

Utilising the methodology of **Participatory Impact Assessments (PIA)** can be an effective manner in ensuring that rich analyses is generated, which is also owned by the beneficiaries, field workers and project managers. This methodology is essentially an extension of **Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)** that intends to look at the impact of development programmes and humanitarian assistance in the lives of the local people and needs to be adjusted to local contexts. When making use of PIA, the local people, or the project clients are recognized as the experts and the process of impact assessment is done with their participation along with other stakeholders (Catley, Burns, Abebe, & Suji, 2013).

The methodology of participatory monitoring can be adapted to undertake participatory evaluation as well. In so planning a participatory evaluation, consideration of time and resources required must be kept in mind.

## **Unit 2: Addressing Challenges in Utilising Monitoring and Evaluation**

There are several key challenges that are faced in monitoring and evaluation of adult education projects. In this unit, some of those challenges, and ways to overcome the same, are discussed.

### **2.1 Some of the Challenges in the Monitoring and Evaluation Process**

#### *2.1.1 Lack of Ownership of the Process*

One of the major issues faced is a lack of ownership of the monitoring and evaluation process or results. Monitoring and Evaluation, if imposed externally, can be seen as a fault-finding exercise, driven by senior managers, donors or external reviewers. This can lead to doubts and confusion among the project implementers as well as certain community members. Such problems can be countered by discussing the issue with the people concerned at the time of the planning itself, which would help educate them on the need and importance of the monitoring and evaluation process. This would also provide an understanding on the expectations regarding the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation of the project. By focusing on the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, and its positive contributions to effective implementation of the project, such reservations, doubts, confusions and fears can be openly addressed at the very beginning of the project cycle.

#### *2.1.2 Conflicting Demands*

Very often, different funders in a given project demand different and changing monitoring and reporting requirements. Externally imposed and designed by experts, such monitoring and evaluation systems have a tendency to not build on existing project capacities. Such processes, over the years, have been termed 'non-negotiable' with a 'one size fits all' requirement.

In such situations, the actual monitoring and evaluation process becomes something that bears little relevance to their aims and reinforces only a one-way, upward accountability (UNESCO, 1997). Therefore, building capacity to design and undertake monitoring and evaluation in each adult education project and its implementing organisation, is essential to address this challenge. It is also important to redefine conventional monitoring and evaluation, in order to make the process more participatory and inclusive. This would imply that the community members become the 'experts', drafting the plan and the process of the monitoring and evaluation exercise.

### *2.1.3 Little Account for Changes in the Lives of the Learners*

Another challenge faced in most monitoring and evaluation processes, is that they do not focus on, or account for qualitative changes in the lives of the learners, or understanding how these changes occur. Many such practices do not provide a framework for representing the complex and multiple processes of institutional and individual learning and changes that are sought in strengthening institutional capacity (INTRAC, 2011). One way to address this challenge is to focus on the individual and community changes that an adult education project intends to bring about at the stage of planning itself. Monitoring and evaluation of the system can then track such changes.

### *2.1.4 Lack of Clarity Regarding Cause and Effect*

The reasons for why certain changes occur in certain groups of people are not always clearly addressed through monitoring and evaluation processes. If the family income of women who attended WELLD programme has gone up after two years, is it because of the knowledge and skills they gained in the project? Or is that improvement due to other factors in the larger economy itself? There are two ways of addressing this issue:

1. There needs to be rigorous *base-line data-collection* of the community, families and women before the project starts. Such a base-line can also help in planning the activities of the project.

Such data collection can once again be collected during and at the end of the project. A comparison between these different sets of data would show how the project has changed the lives of the people.

2. An even more rigorous approach is to create comparisons over time with similar groups of beneficiaries. Typically called '*random control trials*', such an approach requires that some matching community of beneficiaries be assessed along with the women (and their families) who participated in the WELLD project. However, the problem with such an approach is that it is too cost intensive and thus not feasible for small scale programs. Besides, the major challenge in making these comparisons is to control all other factors that might influence the effectiveness of the intervention and which if not excluded could give a wrong impression of the efficacy of the programme.

Choosing among evaluation design options requires making trade-offs. One approach to design selection is 'good enough' rule that selects the best methodological approach, taking onto account the potential value of the evaluation results, feasibility of the design, and the probability of producing credible results (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 1999).

### *2.1.5 Inclusion of Socially Excluded Groups*

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation of adult education projects need to show sensitivity to gender and other aspects of social exclusion. While designing the monitoring and evaluation system, it is important to keep in mind that effective monitoring and evaluation must include the participation of women, as the most marginalized of all communities. In addition, indicators and data-collection methods should be sensitive to the diverse perceptions, agency and opportunities of women in the project context. Final analysis of results should be done in a desegregated manner so that impacts on women can be understood clearly and specific strategies be developed to address the same.

A similar challenge is to include other forms of socially excluded participants. These could be indigenous populations, caste or religious groups, ethnic minorities, young children, semi-literate people, elderly, etc. efforts need to be made in advance of the project and to design an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system, that explicitly embraces such diversity.

### **Unit 3: Mainstreaming Monitoring and Evaluation**

Historically, the objective of monitoring and evaluation has been to measure project and programme inputs, outputs and outcomes. According to Cracknell (2006) in the fifties, monitoring and evaluation began to be implemented, focusing on appraisal rather than evaluation.

#### **3.1 From the Peripheries to the Mainstream**

During the eighties, monitoring and evaluation was set up mainly as an accountability tool to satisfy public opinion and the government's need to know how public aid was being used. In recent times, organizations have internalised the meaning and need for monitoring and evaluation functions. It is now seen as a strategic tool for knowledge acquisition and construction, with the aim of facilitating decision making and learning. In this context, participatory and empowering evaluation represents an interesting development in approach and methodology, aimed at achieving different objectives. Kushner (UNICEF, 2006) suggests that the basic problem in the previous phases was that we were learning what results were being achieved. However there was no information as to how they were being achieved or if the achievements were earlier unforeseen.

In the field of adult education, monitoring and evaluation systems have initially focused on monitoring the implementation of planned activities. Monitoring the progress of learning amongst adult women (like in the WELLD project) has not a common occurrence in the past.



Most evaluations are end-of-the-project measurements of results achieved. As such, they end up counting the outputs accomplished and focus on quantitative achievements. Therefore, completion of learning and achievements of learning standards (as a percentage of total learner groups) are still the most common output measures documented through evaluations but they do not address qualitative change.

The emphasis on these standards tends to overlook qualitative changes that manifest, as better living standards among the beneficiaries. Resources (money and time), capacities and motivations for long-term impact assessment are still not adequately available. As a consequence, many adult education programmes have not been able to develop a body of knowledge about what works in which community, and why – at this stage, data in this direction is rather limited and anecdotal.

Most adult education organisations at the grass-roots level lack resources, capacities and time to be able to undertake serious monitoring and evaluation efforts. However, it is imperative that monitoring and evaluation be integrated from the very initial planning stages of each project.

Projects that have invested time in the planning process, usually describe progress milestones that are to be monitored. Yet, the impacts that are to be achieved, and the underlying assumptions to achieve those impacts, are rarely analysed, documented and evaluated.

In mainstreaming monitoring and evaluation in adult education programmes, participatory methodologies can enhance a sense of ownership within the project teams and beneficiaries. Two types of supports can contribute immensely to mainstreaming M&E in adult education projects within this perspective of participatory methodologies.

### 3.2 Myths Regarding Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

1. In discussing participatory methodologies of monitoring and evaluation, it is generally assumed that no external, independent facilitator or evaluator is required, at any stage or phase of a project. This is a myth!! Some projects or organizations may not have the resources to conduct their own monitoring and evaluation. Thus, an outside agency or individual could facilitate this process. The role of the outsider in such a situation could be to:
  - Help raise issues and questions, which may otherwise not get raised or may be difficult to be raised.
  - Bring into the open, information and concerns which are generally not so clearly stated.
  - Help in articulating the objectives of an evaluation.
  - Help create methods of information collection and analysis
  - Help the project or the organization, take charge of its own evaluation and use it in its own interest, and,
  - Prepare the report of the evaluation.
2. The second myth is related to the role of the donor. In a participatory evaluation process, the needs of resource providers and donors have to be recognized as legitimate. The emphasis on the role of the beneficiaries should not overshadow the importance of the concerns of the donors. The needs of donors should be taken into account explicitly, especially at the initial stage of setting the objectives of evaluation.

Due to the specific knowledge and understanding of a given project or programme, the donors can also contribute at the stage of critical analysis and reflection of results and broad findings, as well as when future directions are being evolved. Sensitivity on the part of donors and the project leadership can ensure valuable participation of the former in monitoring and evaluation.

At the end of the day, all organisations, irrespective of their form, size and legal entity, should seek to have a focus on monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of any kind of work does not solely lie in execution; it is also about learning and evaluating its impacts. Monitoring and evaluation puts into context why and how the inputs result into certain specific outcomes.

When learners feel empowered, when field instructors of an adult education project feel a sense of ownership and when managers responsible for such projects develop a sense of accountability not only to donors but also to the community, mainstreaming monitoring and evaluation in an adult education programme would seem to have occurred.

## Summary

Evaluation, as we have already discussed in the first Module, is a separate entity from monitoring. It is an extremely important function of a programme, as it studies in depth, the efficiency, effectiveness, reliability, sustainability, unanticipated effects and project management of a programme. When properly applied, evaluation can be a great learning exercise for the organisation and will also bring the stakeholders (such as project managers, top management, donors, policy makers, etc.) closer. It is important, then, to conduct an evaluation seriously, asking pertinent questions, and drawing meaningful conclusions.

The future of evaluation lies in the hands of practitioners. It has evolved from a means of measurement, to a descriptive process, and now, to a learning a process. Mainstreaming monitoring and evaluation can be done without much additional investments, if its relevance is understood, and capacities of field implementers and project managers is adequately built about monitoring and evaluation in general, and participatory monitoring and evaluation in particular.

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