



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Certificate Programme

International Perspectives in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 2

Methodological Aspects of Monitoring and Evaluation

Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 1: A Conceptual Understanding of Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 2: Methodological Aspects of Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 3: Method, Tools and Techniques of Monitoring and Evaluation - I

**Unit 4: Method, Tools and Techniques of Participatory Monitoring and
Evaluation - II**

Unit 5: Learning from the Experiences of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 6: Contemporary Issues in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

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Introduction

The terms monitoring and evaluation (M&E), commonly refer to reflections about visions, strategies and actions that enable continual readjustment in programmes. However, they are often associated with specific, donor-defined obligatory systems to be accountable for funding.

With the spread and evolution of participatory approaches in development, attention was subsequently drawn to participatory forms of assessment and learning for more interactive accountabilities. The processes of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) engaged multiple stakeholders on many sides of the development process (donors, communities, governments etc.) in participating and implementing M&E processes, separately and collaboratively.

A far more politicised understanding of development as social change is gaining strength, in contrast to development as projects, delivered by external agencies. Critical reflections on complexity of transformation are part of a new emerging discourse and practice. The theory of change helps individual and groups to strategise and provide a focus to learning and assessment. Assessing change effort requires building a shared, context-specific understanding of how power inequities may be challenged and within which, diverse actors and strategies are located. Assessment and learning for social change involves using methodology to understand the ways to monitor and evaluate progress made vis-à-vis the various levels of decision-making and to their expected results. This unit focuses on understanding participatory monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment, using the methodological framework of Theory of Change (ToC).

As we have discussed in Unit 1, monitoring and evaluation are applied in many different contexts: to specific projects, overall programmes, whole organizations and national policies, among several others.

In order to understand the application of monitoring and evaluation to such settings, we shall, in this unit focus on how M&E is used in the contexts of individual development projects and organizations. Using theories of change as a framework, we shall also explore participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design, associated with project, programme and impact assessment; this shall describe the changes that the organizations set out to make and to understand and demonstrate progress (or lack of it) along the way.

Learning Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be familiar with:

- The framework of theory of change
- The scope of Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E)
- Project management and planning
- Participatory impact assessment
- Organisational or institutional learning
- Ways of building a PM&E system

2.1 Theory of Change (ToC)

2.1.1 Context

Development projects by and large draw upon macro theories of development as frameworks for action. The project approaches to change are premised on an orientation of simple cause and effect thinking. They tend to succeed where problems, needs and possibilities are more visible and under relatively stable conditions and relationships; where the internal and external environments, especially the relationships, of a system are coherent, stable and predictable enough; and where unpredictable outcomes do not threaten desired results. A problem-based approach works logically with plans from the present into the future. The use of projects where the conditions for them are not favourable can be profoundly counter-developmental and destructive for people and their relationships, and can result in failures and setbacks. Misapplied projects can also undermine practice and relationships up and down, among various development actors and agencies.

The relationships between development stakeholders, including governments, donors, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), freelance international development consultants, private companies and even some social movements are increasingly being shaped by the trend of putting projects to tender; paying people as service providers, to achieve centrally determined outcomes. Development funding is fast becoming a marketplace governed by tender processes and business talk. However, this projectisation of development work has deeper consequences. Short-term projects are effectively replacing established organizations with temporary organizations that can be turned on and off. Organizations that have become vehicles for projects live in uncertainty of their existence. There is an overemphasis on accountability and almost every organization or project is stressed with issues of monitoring and evaluation, developing methodologies measure, as well as and report on impact to satisfy donors.

Donors are outsourcing the M&E function to experts and in the process robbing organizations of rich learning processes and the opportunities of making contributions to the body of knowledge related to M&E. Donors themselves face the same pressure to account to their back donors, who in turn must report to their political masters (supposedly accountable to their electorate), who are, for reasons (both good and bad), asking harder questions and setting higher standards each year. There is, paradoxically, a strengthening of pressure for upward, vertical accountability to the western countries (Reeler, 2007).

Of late, the concern to take another look at change processes, of practices and of ways to lead and manage work is fast emerging in the development sector, emphasizing a creative approach to projectable change.

Definition and relevance

A ToC is a clear articulation of an intended activity (the 'if' part), and the expected change it will bring about (the 'then' part or parts). It explains how programme activities and results are connected with each other and contribute to achieving results at different levels. In its simplest form it can be stated as, 'We believe that by doing X (action) it will achieve Y (progress towards an envisaged goal). For example, 'If we train key leaders in negotiating skills, they will become more effective advocates for their interests through nonviolent means'. Or, 'If we generate jobs for unemployed youth, they will be less available to be recruited to violence'. In other words, a well-articulated theory of change represents a testable hypothesis, regarding how the planned activities will contribute to achieving the desired results for the programme (CARE International, 2012).

A ToC is both a methodology, as well as a reflective process.

As a tool and methodology, ToC maps out the logical sequence of an initiative from inputs to outcomes. It explains and articulates the logical connection between a low and a high-level result.

Since every action that is undertaken, from the overall goal of the project to each single activity, has a theory of change behind it, ToC can be used to design, monitor and evaluate social change initiatives (Vogel, 2012).

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A theory of change is:

- A conscious and creative visualization exercise that enables us to focus our energy on specific future realities which are not only desirable, but also possible and probable
- A set of assumptions and abstract projections regarding how we believe reality could unfold in the immediate future, based on i) a realistic analysis of the current context, ii) a self-assessment about our capabilities of process facilitation, and iii) a critical and explicit review of our assumptions
- A thinking-action approach that helps us to identify milestones and conditions that have to occur on the path towards the change that we want to contribute towards
- A multi-stakeholder and collaborative experiential learning exercise that encourages the development of the flexible logic, needed to analyse complex social change processes.
- A semi-structured change map that links our strategic actions to certain process results, that we want to contribute towards in our immediate environment.
- A process tool that helps us to monitor consciously and critically, our individual, as well as our collective ways of thinking and acting.

(Retolaza, 2011)

The mapping of the logical sequence is strengthened by critical thinking about the contextual conditions that influence the programme; the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors; and the different interpretations (assumptions) about how and why that sequence of change might come about. ToC, in this sense, is a dialogical and reflective process, where practitioners and stakeholders reflect on the values, worldviews and philosophies of change to make more explicit their underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of the initiative.

A ToC stems from a specific and clearly stated vision of success and maps out pathways of intermediate outcomes, which are seen as necessary preconditions for success. It also maps the system in which the organization works, in order to identify other actors (individuals or institutions) who can influence the desired outcomes, both positively and negatively. The mapped preconditions of success provide a framework of achievable intermediate outcomes, around which the organization can design direct and lateral strategies. These strategies are aimed at influencing other actors in the system and developing effective collaborative networks and partnerships for change.

2.2 Redefining Scope: Project and Organisation

There are two broad categories of ToC approaches:

- a) Those that focus on how a project or programme brings change, and develop a linear path of cause and effect
- b) Those that explore how change happens and then analyse what that means for the part that a particular organisation can play (James, 2011).

Approaches in the first category focus on the areas of **project/programme management and impact assessment**. PM&E for project impact assessment helps to distinguish whether or not (a) project interventions are achieving their identified objectives, (b) programme objectives remain relevant over time and (c) Best action strategies have been pursued (Gaventa & Estrella, 1998). PM&E for project management and planning includes systematic analysis and reflection on project/programme and plan for future goals and activities. The stakeholders and programme managers assess information, to understand whether or not project objectives have been met and how resources have been used, in order to help improve programme implementation and make critical decisions about project funding.

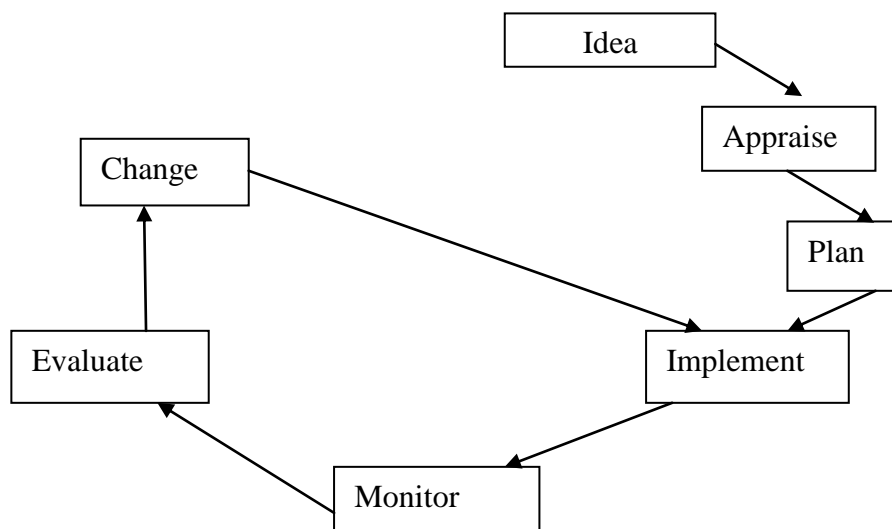
Approaches in the second category take a more complex and systemic view of development, believing that even when the programme logic is carefully worked out, other factors outside organisations' control can cause a programme to fail. These tend to involve a broader, contextual analysis of how change happens - including exploring other actors and defining their role in change - before analysing how an organisation or programme contributes to this change. PM&E is increasingly being used for organizational strengthening or institutional learning (Gaventa & Estrella, 1998).

2.3 Project Management and Planning

2.3.1 Project cycle

A project proceeds from conception to conclusion through what is known as the 'project cycle'. Descriptions of what this cycle looks like can be found from many different sources. For instance, Rubin's description of a project cycle is given in Illustration 1.

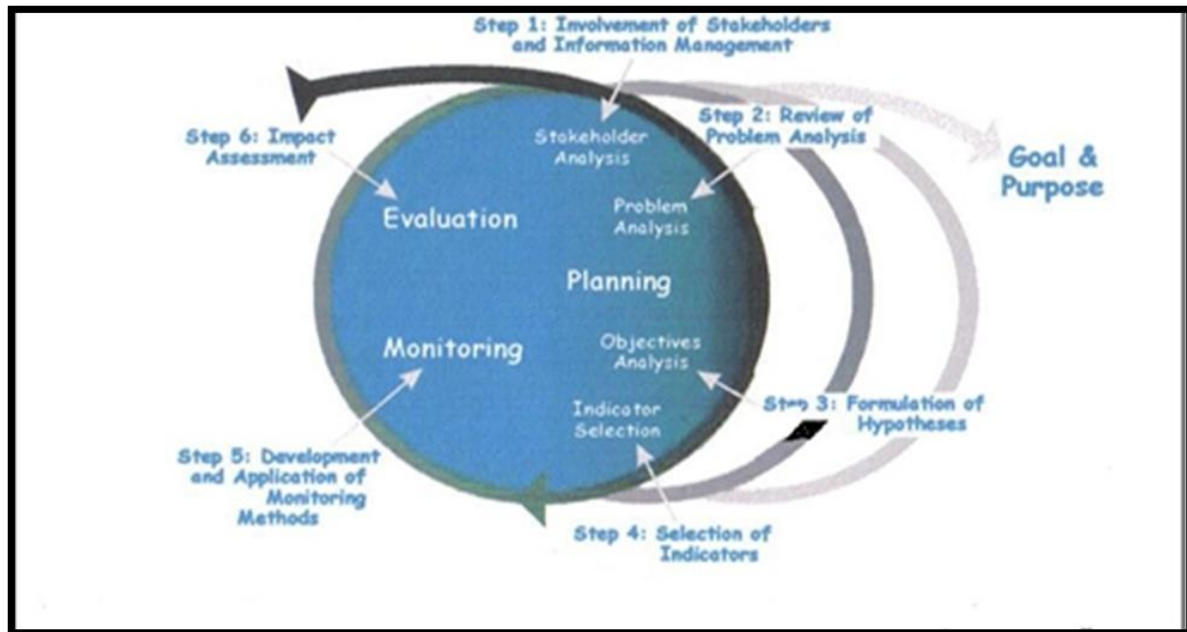
Illustration 1: The project cycle based on Rubin (1995):



Once the evaluation has shown any need to change, then such change is implemented and this is repeated with each successive cycle.

Hedwig and Steiner (2002), show a rather more elaborate (but nonetheless broadly similar) approach to a development project's lifecycle, which more clearly incorporates the planning-monitoring-evaluating triangle we examined in Unit 1. This is shown in an adapted form in Illustration 2.

Illustration 2: The project cycle adapted from Hedwig and Steiner



It can be seen that there are a number of steps in this cycle, which are all repeated as the cycle proceeds through each round.

2.3.2 Key Steps for operationalising M&E in projects

Let us briefly examine key steps to initiate monitoring and evaluation in projects. The examination will refer to various terms, tools and techniques, which we will look at in more detail in later sections of this unit.

Involving the stakeholders

‘Stakeholders’ are people or organisations, having some kind of stake or interest in a project. They can only very rarely be simply (and patronisingly) be categorised into ‘us’ (who provide what is needed to run the project) and ‘them’ (who receive its benefits). More commonly, the people and organisations, who comprise the stakeholders, are many and include participants/beneficiaries, the funders, project staff and

management. Other stakeholders include project partners (where a number of organisations may be involved in the project) and people and organisations who, while not being 'beneficiaries', may be directly or indirectly affected by the project, such as government officials or agencies.

Each stakeholder has not only the knowledge that they uniquely possess but also perceptions based on different values and priorities. Referring to Illustration 1, we see the involvement and participation of stakeholders' needs to exist from the very beginning itself: in the determination of the 'problem' or 'need' and also in the formulation of the 'idea' (what is to be done). At later stages of the cycle, the success of monitoring and evaluation (not least in terms of leading to change) will be dependent on all stakeholders being involved; indeed, some will claim that success cannot be achieved otherwise.

Analysing the problem or need

At this point, all the elements of the need or problem must be analysed. These include the people affected, the environment, the operational institutions, the resources available and needed, the factors and influences at work, the predictability (certainties or uncertainties) associated with each, as well as, the connections and inter-relationships between them. A tool that is used here is known as the 'Problem Tree Analysis' tool.

At this stage, it is important to create an accurate picture of the situation before any intervention occurs. This picture is often referred to as a 'baseline' study and it provides a point from which any changes that occur can be measured, so that 'before' and 'after' comparisons can be made. Without such a study, which can utilise any of the methods and tools described later, it will more be difficult to identify causal links between what was done and what happened (Rubin, 1995).

Formulating purposes and objectives

The problem/need analysis will lead to the formulation of the project, in terms of what it is to do and what its objectives are. Within these, the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, as discussed in Unit 1, will need to be formulated. As with previous steps, the different stakeholders may well have different views and thus the formulation of the actual purposes and objectives of the project and the monitoring/ evaluation may not easily be achieved. What is to be avoided here (although it still happens), is the imposition of purposes and objectives of the project by external stakeholders, in the absence of any kind of consultation with the other more local stakeholders.

The formulation of project objectives will include what its intended outputs, outcomes and impacts will be and what indicators will be used to show whether they are being achieved. This aspect of planning and preparation has its own tools and techniques, which we will discuss later in Unit 3.

Selection of indicators

Indicators can be of any aspect of performance - inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, as well as (longer term) impacts. In simple terms, an indicator is a sign that communicates information about how things are proceeding. Indicators should be 'SMART' (Abbot and Guijit, 1997 in Gaventa & Estrella, 1998) - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

Indicators may be quantitative – a measurement expressed in some kind numbers – numbers of people who attended the meeting. They may also be qualitative - descriptive statements or characteristics that are not quantifiable decision- making process was smooth, group cooperation and solidarity (Dwivedi, 2001). As with previous steps, indicators need to be suggested, adapted, negotiated and approved by the relevant stakeholders.

Indicators are thereby qualitative or quantitative measures, which are used as the basis for monitoring progress against the plan and evaluating results and performance at each level of the chain Inputs □ Activities □ Outputs □ Outcomes □ Impact.

Fowler (1997) provides a simple distinction between outputs, outcomes and impact, and relates them to possible indicators for each, as shown at Table 1.

Table 1: Outputs, outcomes and impacts		
	What is measured?	Indicators
Outputs	Effort	Numbers involved in activities
Outcomes	Effectiveness	Sustained supply/production of benefits
Impacts	Change	Difference from original state

Source: Fowler, 1997

Table 2 shows some examples of indicators (quantitative and qualitative) taken from a women's credit/agriculture project.

Table 2: Indicators in a project	
	Indicators
Outputs	Number of women who become aware of the benefits of rearing animals in a scientific way Number of women gaining the skills and knowledge to rear animals Number of women mobilising loans to purchase animals Number of women constructing sheds to take proper care of animals
Outcomes	Number of women improving income from animal rearing by a minimum of Rs. 1,500 per month
Impacts	Improved self-esteem among women Women investing their money in their own and their family's health care

(Source: Adapted from ASK, 2005)

It is important to also keep following six criteria in mind when selecting performance indicators:

1. **Validity:** Does it measure the result?
2. **Reliability:** Is it a consistent measure over time?
3. **Sensitivity:** When the result changes, will it be sensitive to those changes?
4. **Simplicity:** Will it be easy to collect and analyse the information?
5. **Utility:** Will the information be useful for decision-making and learning?
6. **Affordability:** Can the programme/project afford to collect the information?

Roche further claims that when indicators are used more as specific examples of change, different characteristics become important (Impact Assessment for Development Agencies, 2002). In this context, he refers to SPICED indicators, elucidated in the note bank below.

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'SPICED' Indicators

Subjective: Informants have a special position or experience that gives them unique insights, which may yield a very high return on the investigators time. In this sense, what may be seen by others as 'anecdotal' becomes critical data because of the value of the source.

Participatory: Indicators should be developed in conjunction with those best placed to assess them. This could mean involving a project's ultimate beneficiaries, and it can also mean involving local staff and other stakeholders.

Interpretable and communicable: Locally defined indicators may not mean much to other stakeholders, so they often need to be explained.

Crosschecked and comparable: The validity of assessment needs to be crosschecked, by comparing different indicators and progress, and by using different informants, methods and researchers.

Empowering: The process of setting and assessing indicators should be empowering in itself and allow groups and individuals to reflect critically on their changing situation.

Diverse and disaggregated: There should be a deliberate effort to seek out different indicators from a range of groups, especially men and women. This information needs to be recorded in such a way that these differences can be assessed over time.

(Roche, 2000)

The chosen indicators may not be the obvious ones when the knowledge and experience of participants/beneficiaries are recognised and valued among the stakeholders. Gaventa and Estrella tell this interesting story of a development project established by an international development agency, based on an account by Roche.

“(The agency) began working with agro-pastoralists in Mali, on a project that aimed to regenerate a riverine fodder crop (*Panicum bourgou*), along the Niger River. In the process of establishing indicators for crop regeneration, (the agency) learned that differences existed within households and between social groups in terms of how success was measured.

It had been assumed by most people - particularly by field extension workers and external aid agencies working in the area that the primary reason that groups were interested in this regeneration project was to ensure adequate fodder for their animals during the dry season.

(While) this was true for many individuals... however, discussion with women revealed that they would judge success by asking the children if they had drunk more *kundou* - a sweet drink also made from this grass. Discussions with beneficiaries found this criterion for success to be a key indicator that would allow rapid appraisal of several objectives of the project: if the *kundou* was available to children, it would then indicate that there had been enough to satisfy the needs of animals”. (Gaventa & Estrella, 1998)

Data collection

Once the project is planned, it is then operationalised and implemented. During the implementation process and also after the project is completed, the chosen indicators at the planning stage determine what information is gathered and assessed during monitoring and evaluation. The information will be gathered according to the indicators chosen and will be either quantitative or qualitative in nature.

A number of tools and methods for data collection exist. We will go over them in the next section.

Data analysis

Bakewell, Adams and Pratt (2003) have effectively highlighted the steps involved in data analysis:

Review - Data on the different indicators should be brought together and organised to show what information is available to give evidence of change in the levels of indicators - effort, effect and change.

Summarise - Using the results of this review, the most reliable and important points of evidence showing effort, effect and change should be summarised. This will give an overview of the project's progress at the levels of outputs, outcomes and impact.

Interrogate - Various questions should now be asked and answers put forward. For example:

- Is the picture given in the summary a realistic one?
- Do stakeholders agree about the picture presented - is there consensus or conflict?
- What factors explain the success or failure of the project at each level - output, outcome and impact?
- Are there other external factors which should be taken into account?
- Have appropriate indicators been used?
- Have appropriate methods for collecting data been used?

Learn - The summary of data and answers to questions should highlight lessons of what works and what does not work, in terms of activities, approaches and policies. These should be recorded.

Action -The analysis should conclude with actions that are to be taken as a result of the lessons learnt. For monitoring purposes these may relate to revisions to the project's practice including new activities, revised outputs; or to the monitoring system which can be new indicators, new data collection tools (Bakewell, Adams and Pratt, 2003).

Data use

An important step is to ensure that the analysed data is used effectively to improve performance, strengthen institutional learning, and the other reasons we have stated in Unit 1.

In the absence of the same, monitoring and evaluation will not serve the desired purpose.

2.3.3 Strengthening learning and change at project management and planning levels

PM&E offers new ways to strengthen learning and change at project management and planning levels. It ensures that the implementation of different projects within the action plan

— or smaller individual projects — leads to the expected outcomes. The key project stakeholders participate actively in reflecting and assessing the progress of their

project, in particular the achievement of results and consequently learn from change; such ways of assessing and learning from change tend to be more inclusive and reflect the

perspectives and aspirations of those most directly affected by the programme (World Bank, 2010)

Steps in the development and implementation of a PM&E process in programme management and planning:

Step 1: Planning the PM&E process and determining objectives and indicators

The PM&E process in the programme management and planning levels using the ToC framework engages stakeholders as active participants, not as sources of information. At this initial stage, the stakeholder groups to be involved in the planning of the PM&E process are identified. The stakeholders define the objectives of the PM&E, including what will be monitored, how and by whom. The planning stage requires a lengthy process of negotiation, contestation and collaborative decision-making amongst the various stakeholders. Identifying the objectives and monitoring indicators can be the most difficult part of planning a PM&E process. In some cases, a common set of indicators is developed, while in other instances different stakeholder groups develop their own sets of indicators.

Step 2: Gathering data

Data collection can include the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods and tools. Quantitative methods can include community surveys, interviews and observations. Qualitative methods can include various participatory learning methods using visual, interviewing and group tools and exercises.

Step 3: Analysing data

While data analysis is often thought of as a rather mechanical and expert-driven task, PM&E provides an opportunity to actively involve various categories of programme stakeholders in the critical analysis of successes and constraints, as well as in the formulation of conclusions and lessons learned.

Step 4: Sharing the information and defining actions to be taken

In this step, the results of M&E activities are shared with other stakeholders, and there is discussion of appropriate actions to be taken based on the findings. The reflection process provides a forum for exchanging and evaluating information. The stakeholder groups systematically review progress of the project and look back to the start of their activities, compare the situation with where they currently stand, in order to understand what has changed and adjustments that are required. The process builds commitment to implementing any recommended corrective actions (Njuki et al, 2006).

2.4 Participatory Impact Assessment

One common function of PM&E is to evaluate the impact of a given programme and the changes that have occurred as result of the programme initiative. The emphasis is on the comparison between programme objectives and actual achievement.

In its broadest sense, impact assessment is the process of identifying the anticipated or actual impacts of a development intervention. It studies those social, economic and environmental factors which the intervention is designed to affect or may inadvertently affect. It may take place before the approval of an intervention, after completion of the intervention, or at any stage in between. Assessment before intervention forecasts potential impacts as part of the planning, design and approval of an intervention. Assessment after completion of project identifies actual impacts during and after implementation, to enable corrective action to be taken if necessary, and to provide information for improving the design of future interventions.

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Rationale of impact assessment

There are a number of reasons to assess the impact of development efforts. These are not always compatible. We need to:

Demonstrate success (to donors, ourselves, the public; to be seen as supporting progress in meeting MDGs etc.), both to justify funds received and to solicit further funding.

Understand how our efforts impact on local communities, in order to improve the effectiveness of our interventions; to make a more significant difference in people's lives.

Be accountable to the people (stakeholders) for whom we are working: we should not "do development to local communities" but rather work with them to understand the changes they want to make in their lives and then to analyse progress (or no progress) together.

Use the findings from impact assessments to advocate for changes in behaviour, attitudes, policy and legislation at all levels.

(O'Flynn, 2010)

2.4.1 Difference between M&E and impact assessment

Traditionally, development plans follow a logic which starts from the expression of a development goal which is broken down into a) objectives (or purposes); b) outcomes (or results) and c) outputs (and activities), which are in terms of monitoring and evaluating this plan.

Monitoring relates to the effort or work that goes on in relation to a project or programme (the activities and outputs); **evaluation** relates to outcomes or the results of these efforts; and **impact** relates to changes in peoples' lives that relate to these results.

For example, in a project to build social housing for a local community

- Monitoring would relate to the purchase of materials, and building the houses according to plans that have been drawn up.
- Evaluation would assess the results of these efforts: how good was the plan? How well were the houses built? Was the project cost effective? But the questions cannot stop there. It's possible to have well-built, cost effective housing schemes which are of no use to those for whom they were intended (for example, aborigine 'settlements'). In development, there are thousands of 'successful projects and programmes' which fail to make a positive impact on the lives of people they aim to serve. Some projects may result in negative impacts.
- Impact therefore assesses the 'So what?' question: how has this project actually affected the lives of the people it aimed to support (Flynn, 2010)?

The table below clarifies the difference between monitoring, evaluation and impact in relation to development planning.

Monitoring	Evaluation	Impact Assessment
Measures on-going Activities	Measures performance against objectives	Assesses change in people's lives: positive or negative, Intended or not
Main work during implementation	Main work in middle or at end of project/programme cycle	Can be included at all stages and/or can be used specifically After the end of programme/project
Focus on interventions	Focus on interventions	Focus on affected populations
Focus on outputs	Focus on outcomes	Focus on impacts
'What is being done?'	What has happened? Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?'	'What has changed? For whom? How significant is it for them?'

(O'Hynn, 2010)

2.4.2 Participatory impact assessments (PIAs) within ToC framework

PIAs frequently use tools originating from other forms of participatory enquiry, such as PRA and PLA. These are incorporated in an effort to involve local communities, groups and individuals in data gathering, analysis and archiving. The ToC framework allows for more reflection and learning and results in:

- Establishing causal linkages between project interventions and their outcomes: This is achieved through a continuous follow up of the activities, the effect of these activities and the changes that occur as a result.
- Incorporating participatory perspectives in impact assessment: The desired results are developed using participatory tools during the PM&E process. Indicators are developed with all stakeholders and are used to determine the progress made towards the achievement of these results.

- Emphasising different types of changes: Different types of impacts are captured, including subjective and objective changes; tangible and intangible changes; negative and positive changes; and changes on different categories of participants in the community such as the men, women, children and the youth.
- Learning from changes: A reflective process integrated into PIAs allows for learning and making adjustments based on the results. The ToC as a framework offers an opportunity to describe the changes in the world that the project sets out to make, and to understand and demonstrate progress (or lack of it) along the way. It offers an opportunity for greater clarity, better communication and the potential for improved accountability.

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Issues of change addressed in PIAs

What changes have there been in the community since the start of the project?
Which of the changes are attributable to the project?

Who or what was involved in the change?

What strategies were used to bring about the change?

What were the contexts that affected how the change happened? What was the process or pathway of change?

What difference have the changes made to people's lives?

(Watson C. , 2008)

2.5 Organisational strengthening or institutional learning

For change to occur, organisations and institutions need to learn what they have done well; what they have not done; how they are perceived by their stakeholders; and how they can appropriately respond by using this information to improve on institutional behaviour and performance. PM&E from within can help develop a systematic, yet adaptive way of understanding what has or has not been achieved.

There are some common themes that may be useful in implementing a successful PM&E process for institutional learning. These include the following:

Change and flexibility

Individual and organisational learning can take place, where a process and a methodology is sufficiently adaptive to allow learning to be applied and made tangible, almost immediately.

One example of this openness to change that demonstrates an organisation's willingness to learn is the flexible use of indicators, or daring to move away from them into focusing on assessing critical changes without quantification. This change in indicators in itself can demonstrate that those involved in the PM&E and planning systems are responsive to the lessons learned from previous cycles about new priorities or interests (Gaventa & Bauer, 2000).

Building ownership

For institutions to change, individuals need to be motivated to apply learning. A sense of ownership over the process and results is essential. PM&E has the potential to enhance this sense of ownership amongst stakeholders both within the institution and outside (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000).

Developing accountability within the institution

Accountability is not only related to financial transparency, but also to learning about the social and economic impact of the organization's activities. This involves changing (and reversing) relationships amongst and between stakeholders, including those within the organisation.

Accepting the responsibility to be accountable through dialogue and disclosure implies certain openness to learning. For institutions to change, actors internal to the organisation need to be willing to probe into their own organisation; recognise and discuss different 'hierarchies'; be open about mistakes, as well as successes; and, above all, know that the opinions expressed by them can lead to internal, as well as external change (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000).

Trust and trustworthiness

Validating multiple perspectives is crucial in making people feel more secure about expressing their analysis and concerns. Yet, trust requires more than 'permission' to give voice to opinions. Actors that hold more structural, institutionalised power, (whether managers, donors or governmental agencies), need to start applying self-evaluation to themselves and be transparent about their successes and shortcomings. This 'openness' beyond the act of simply recording or monitoring, is one of the first steps in establishing trust. Incorporating different stakeholders in dialogue-based appraisals regarding the quality of an organisation's performance can also offer a way to establish trust, and, hence, the capacity to change, especially if the evaluation process is seen to lead to tangible action (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000).

2.6 Building a PM&E System: Methodology

When undertaking PM&E, those involved need to ask themselves (Marsden, Oakley & Pratt, 1994; and Rubin, 1995):

- Why are we doing it?
- Who is it for?
- What is its scope (and what is its focus)?
- How are we going to do it (and who will do it)?
- When do we do it?
- What then?
- Why?

We have discussed the many and various answers to the question of why in Unit 1 under the section of “purposes of monitoring and evaluation”.

Who is it for?

It can refer to any or all of the following stakeholders.

- Those involved in running and managing the programme organisation/s or project, or those involved in the making of the policy
- The participants/beneficiaries and their community
- The funders
- Government agencies - local, national
- Any other project partners
- Policy-makers
- The wider public

So, for example: If the reason why is about capturing institutional or organisational learning and knowledge- building, or ‘empowering’, then the organisation itself and the project’s participants/beneficiaries will be among those who it is for.

However, if the reason why is to create a basis on which to justify project or organisational activities to others, then these others (such as funders or government) will be among those who it is for.

But, if the reason why is about building credibility among and relationships with the community, with other stakeholders and more generally among the public, then they will all be among those whom it is for.

The key issue that needs to be confronted is how participatory the exercise is going to be, and, in particular, whether the beneficiaries are merely one stakeholder, with no greater rights of involvement, ownership or control than the other stakeholders, or whether they are recognised as the principal stakeholder.

What is the scope? The scope of a monitoring/evaluation exercise can be a project, a programme, all or part of an organisation, a community or another defined geographic area, or a policy. The scope can be from gender-awareness within an organisation, to antipoverty policy of the government at the national level, or even a process. It will be evident from this that the focus of an evaluation can be broad covering the totality of work, structures and processes at work within an entire organisation or programme; it can also be very narrow considering one small group of project participants, or one aspect such as governance arrangements of an organisation.

How and by whom? This brings us to the question of how the monitoring and evaluation are to be carried out, and by whom. Rubin (1995) summarises the two primary decisions to be made here as:

- a) **Formal or informal methods:** Formal methods include, written Terms of Reference (ToR), objectives, indicators, modes and criteria of analysis and assessment, stakeholders etc. They often take place at defined stages, use external evaluators (see below), and result in written reports.

They are frequently geared to judging the impact but they can be expensive. Informal methods are more likely to be done internally, through participatory methodologies and as continuing processes built into the project cycle and budget. Reporting and feedback processes are also more informal, resulting in meetings and discussions rather than written reports.

b) Internal or external: 'Traditional' or 'conventional' forms of monitoring and evaluation (as distinct participatory forms) tended to use an external 'expert', because of the desire for 'objectivity'. Internal evaluations can be done in a number of different ways - an organisation or programme may have within its structure, a unit or department given charge of the task; alternatively, a group comprised of any or all of staff, participants/beneficiaries and other stakeholders may be given charge of the task. The term 'self-evaluation' is typically used to describe these forms. However, where external stakeholders are involved, the term 'joint evaluation' is sometimes used. Where participants/beneficiaries are recognised as the principal stakeholder, the term 'participatory monitoring and evaluation' is used.

It is to be noted that 'internal' versus 'external' evaluations, do not necessarily present an either/or case. Even in participatory forms of evaluation, external persons/organisations can be used, but they are more likely to be used as experts, having some specialised knowledge or skills, and are more likely to be termed and act as 'resource people' or 'facilitators'.

When? As noted above, monitoring and evaluation can be a continuous process embedded in a project cycle or in an organisation's internal governance, management and operating procedures; it does not necessarily have to take place at any particular point of time. When and where it does, these points may be pre-planned, and as Rubin (1995) detailed:

- At the project appraisal stage (sometimes called ex-ante)
- At a 'mid-term' point (sometimes known as mid-term reviews)
- On project completion (final evaluation)and
- Done some time after a project is completed, in order to judge long-term impact and/or sustainability (Ex-post evaluation)

There may be other circumstances that necessitate an evaluation, such as the occurrence of unexpected problems or major changes in the operating environment, which may be anything from climatic/seasonal change to changes in the policies and priorities of funders.

Caution must be exercised with regards to the timing of monitoring and evaluation exercises. For example, an 'evaluation sheet' is typically handed out to students on the completion of a training programme, or to participants at the end of a workshop or conference. With human nature being as it is, the typical result, if the event has been well-run, is that most people feel happy, informed, and newly skilled. In other words - outputs are good. But what if the evaluation sheet was distributed say a month later, to determine the outcomes in terms of the actual application of the new skills or knowledge? Or if it was distributed a year or more later to determine impacts, in terms of the results of applying new knowledge or skills? These are not, of course, mutually exclusive options; salutary lessons might be learned by conducting all three ex-post evaluations.

Even longer time-scales need to be considered in other situations. To take just two examples - When evaluating the long-term impact of anti-poverty programmes and policies, or of programmes designed to transform power relations across gender or class divides, one might have to wait for a generation to pass before such impact can be properly evaluated.

What then? Perhaps, the most difficult aspect of monitoring and evaluation exercises, is the question of what then or, what now, or, so what? Illustrations 1 and 2 see the cycle as continuous, where judgements, findings and conclusions are fed back into the cycle.

Here, and indeed at every point in the cycle, choices and decisions have to be made; no amount of good design, specialists in a monitoring or evaluation process makes these choices and decisions for those involved - the stakeholders have to make them themselves. And this process may be tough; it may actually require scrapping or radical re-designing and re-planning of what is being done. On the other extreme, they may show that the task has been done so well, that it is no longer required.

NOTE BANK

Setting up an M&E system involves six steps that need to be dealt with twice

In general at initial design and in detail at start-up:

Establishing the purpose and scope: Why do we need M&E and how comprehensive should our M&E system be?

Identifying performance questions: These include information needs and indicators. What do we need to know in order to monitor and evaluate the project, in order to manage it well?

Planning information, gathering and organising: How will the required information be gathered and organised?

Planning critical reflection processes and events: How will we make sense of the information gathered and use it to make improvements?

Planning for quality communication and reporting: What, how and to whom do we want to communicate in terms of our project activities and processes?

Planning for the necessary conditions and capacities: What is needed to ensure that the M&E system actually works?

(IFAD, 2014)

THINK TANK

Think about doing PM&E for your organizational learning. What steps will be relevant in establishing a PM&E process?

In your view, how does the methodological framework of the theory of change (ToC) help in PM&E?

Summary

A quick recap of what was covered in the unit:

We understood the relevance of the theory of change in the context of a monitoring and evaluation exercise. We further explored the concept of PM&E in project management and planning, as well as impact assessment. This unit also helped us to understand participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Key concepts related to output, outcomes and impacts were discussed, as were the stages at which these could be monitored and evaluated.

The unit discussed the different stakeholders and their role in project monitoring and evaluation; it also stressed upon the importance of involving the people for whom the project is intended (the beneficiaries) in the entire process from the planning, to the implementation to the evaluation and in assessing the impact of the programme in changing their lives.

We also learned how key findings of the M&E process could a) be used for immediate and remedial action to ensure that the project achieved its objectives; and b) how the information so generated could be used for institutional strengthening as well as organisational strengthening, using the methodological framework of theory of change.

Key steps for building an M&E system were also detailed out.

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