

Participatory monitoring and evaluation in extension programmes

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Monitoring and evaluation is essential to the management of all development activities. We need feedback to manage our activities adaptively, responding to changes. This is true for farmers, local project workers, and staff of research institutes and development organizations, both government and non-government. But it is often argued that the product of standard quantitative monitoring and evaluation is often divorced from the needs, the indigenous knowledge, values, expectations and interests of the stakeholders at the outset. Thus there is a need to move towards a monitoring and evaluation system having greater local value. In projects and programmes, beneficiaries should be involved throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. Participatory approaches allow for, the sense of project ownership on the part of beneficiaries and hence ensure their full support. Participation in monitoring and evaluation acts as part of a self-management system, it enables the various partners in development to learn from experience, from successes and from failures, and to do better in future. Keeping this in mind, the present paper was prepared with the objective to explain the concept of participatory monitoring and evaluation and its importance in extension.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Monitoring, Evaluation, Extension programme

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In the recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the participatory approaches to development. This approach emphasizes the need of involving beneficiaries of all development initiatives in all stages. Hence, there emerges a new model of monitoring and evaluation also, the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) (Guit *et al.*, 1998). In the context of discussing PME, it is important to provide an idea about some basic concepts related to it, which are as follow:

Participation:

Participation is the act of taking part in any activity. It involves sharing different experience and knowledge with one another through listening, learning, asking questions, and showing respect for all persons involved.

Participation is the process during which individuals, groups and organizations are consulted about or have the opportunity to become actively involved in a project or programme of activity (Mikkelsen, 1995). It is involvement in people's development of themselves, their

lives, and their environment.

Monitoring:

The word monitoring is derived from the Latin word ‘*monere*’ meaning ‘to warn’. According to Oxford Dictionary monitoring means ‘maintaining regular surveillance’.

According to Bamberger (1986), “It is an internal project activity designed to provide constant feedback on the progress of a project, the problem it is facing, and the efficiency with which it is being implemented.”

To be precise and brief, monitoring system is an information system for management decision-making. It is, thus, a management function and beings with the start of the project and ends with the completion of the project.

Evaluation:

The word evaluation comes from the Latin word ‘*Evaluere*’ meaning to find the value of a particular thing, idea or action. According to Webster’s Third international Dictionary evaluation means ‘the act or result of evaluation’ *i.e.*, judgment, assessment, rating, and interpretation.

According to Boulmetis and Dutwin (2000),

“Evaluation is the systematic process of collecting and analyzing data in order to determine whether and to what degree objectives were or are being achieve.”

Broadly, evaluation is a process of value judgment by which one can judge whether the programme is good, if so, what are the factors contributing to its success and if it is not good, to find out the reasons for its failure, so that the programme could be improved in quality to produce maximum impact.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME):

It is a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project or programme, share control over the content, the process, and the results of the monitoring and evaluation activity engage in taking or identifying corrective actions. PME aims at engaging and empowering communities through shared control, joint learning, and ongoing reflection, in order to better respond to concerns, improve progress, and achieve desired goals.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing and regular process which actively involves stakeholders in all the stages of collecting, analyzing and using

Sr. No.	Conventional monitoring and evaluation	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
1.	Role of stakeholders is passive providing information but not participating in the evacuation itself. It is more donor focused and linear	Stakeholders are central to the process and the process is multi-dimensional
2.	It emphasizes only on the final output, the report.	It places emphasis both on process and final output, the report.
3.	Its design is defined by the donor in isolation	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation involves stakeholders in its design
4.	Donor’s control on resources and decision	Control and decisions are made by program/project beneficiary.
5.	An extractive process, outsider’s perspective	Collective learning process
6.	Not so labour intensive and time consuming	More labour intensive and time consuming
7.	Development of analytical skills is not possible in conventional evaluation as here the insiders are passive	It develops analytical skills of people involved needed to make decisions
8.	Predetermined indicators of success	People identify their own indicators of success
9.	It is done to establish accountability to determine if funding continues or not	It is done to empower local people to initiate, control and take corrective action.
10.	Distancing of evaluators from other participants; complex procedure; delayed, limited access to results	Self-evaluation; simple methods adopted to local culture; open, immediate sharing of results through local involvement in the evaluation process
11.	Example: In an organization working to improve the water quality of a village, field staff collects the number of chlorine bottles distributed in the village every month. Villagers and project field staff discuss this information during their regular review meetings. This data is then shared with the donor. When the number of chlorine bottles distributed decreased, the project field staff tried to figure out why by asking the villagers. With a simple change in strategy, they were able to once again increase the number of chlorine bottles distributed. Monitoring information was used within the organization to improve the programme, and also to report to the donor	Example: In another organization working to improve the water quality of a village, every month field staff collects the number of chlorine bottles distributed in village for water purification, and report those figures to their project manager. Every month, the project manager adds up the distribution numbers, and sends the report to the donor. Very few people actually look at the data to see what is it saying. Is the distribution of chlorine bottles increasing or decreasing? Will the project reach its objective to improve health status of rural people? How can field staff, community members work together to make the project a success?

(Basu *et al.*, 2006)

information on an intervention with a view to assessing the processes and results and making recommendations. It involves groups of local people coming together to discuss their own concerns and decide how they can best improve them. It elicits involvement of local programme stakeholders, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences and to learn from them. PME can be done by using different tools like maps, group meeting, drawing/discussion, murals and posters, open-ended stories, most significant change stories, semi-structural interview, survival survey, unserialized posterset (Basu *et al.*, 2006).

Purpose of participatory monitoring and evaluation:

A PME process can enhance participation in development projects and programmes. Thus it can:

- Enhance efficiency and effectiveness: PME processes can contribute to results-based management by improving policymaking, facilitating adaptive management, enhancing efficiency of resource use and promoting staff motivation.

- Improve the exercise of power: Some characteristics of the exercise of power are openness, transparency, responsiveness, predictability and accountability. Gathering and sharing information and dialogue are key features of PME processes, which contribute to openness and transparency.

- Enhance equity of outcomes: Ensuring equity of outcomes requires commitment of all stakeholder groups to question the existing distribution of services. It involves an assessment into the responsiveness of projects, service providers, and local government as perceived by groups of (potential) users who tend to be marginalized or socially excluded.

- Enhance stakeholder interactions: Usually there are multiple stakeholders involved in local development. Well-structured PME systems may help communities and civil society organization to develop partnerships with projects, office bearers and other stakeholders (Hilhorst and Guijt, 2006).

Principles of participatory monitoring and evaluation:

Four broad principles have been identified to be at the heart of PME. They are:

Participation:

Defined as “opening up” the design process to

include those most directly affected *i.e.* project participants. All stakeholders should contribute in designing the M&E process and agree to analyze the data together with the evaluator.

Negotiation:

An agreement between the evaluator and the directly affected stakeholder groups on what to monitor and evaluate, methods of data collection, the manner of sharing information and findings, along with suggestions about future actions.

Learning:

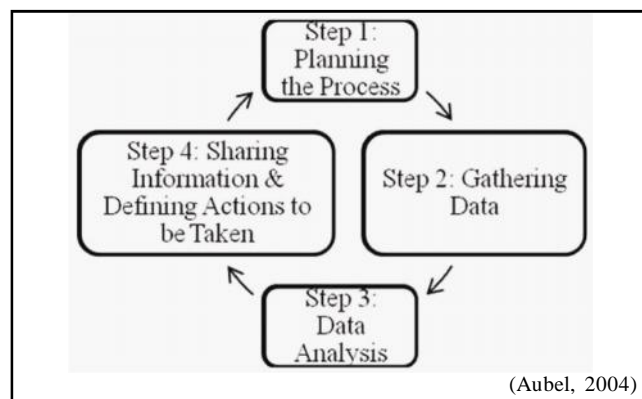
Agreeing how lessons learned will be used and taken forward in order to make improvements in the future. This forms the basis for consequent improvement and corrective actions.

Flexibility:

An essential element of PM&E since the numbers, roles, and skills of stakeholders, the external environment, and other factors are fluid and can change frequently (UNESCO, 2007 and Shah, 2017).

Participatory monitoring and evaluation process:

Participatory monitoring and evaluation process includes four steps.



These steps are explained with the help of an example. In this example an intervention has been planned for a community in Punjab, which focuses on improving the nutritional status of the women. The intervention focuses on sending a message to the community members that – healthy women lead to healthy families. The intervention uses methods like training of the community men and women, on how to

cook low cost nutritious recipes, lectures and demonstrations related to the importance of nutrition among women and how to grow vegetables at home, respectively. The intervention is being carried but the organization tends to do a participatory monitoring and evaluation, to understand its impact.

A key aspect of community engagement is informing people about the project and its mandate to manage expectations around what the project can or cannot do. Information should be provided as often as possible about project plans, entitlements of beneficiaries (in terms of goods and services and accountability), progress monitored and results noted. It is imperative that information is provided at every stage of the project cycle, until the project exit strategy is completed. The extent to which a project actually encourages participation, beneficiary accountability and level of participation should also be monitored.

Advantages of participatory monitoring and evaluation:

- PME allows programme managers and field staff

to better understand the perspectives of community members, which can contribute to improved programme implementation.

- It elicits involvement of local programme stakeholders, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences and to learn from them.
- Involving beneficiaries in evaluation increases its reliability and provides the opportunity to receive useful feedback and ideas for corrective actions.
- PME can increase the capacity and confidence of local program staff and community members to analyze their own needs and programs, and to undertake action-planning based on the conclusions of such analysis.
- Through involvement of community and programme stakeholders in M&E, community members can articulate their priorities and criticisms of development programme strategies.
- It contributes to the sustainability of programme strategies by increasing the sense of ownership on the community members.
- It increases the motivation of stakeholders to contribute ideas to corrective actions.

Steps	Purpose of this step	Example
Step 1 (Planning the process)	This step includes deciding on the participants who will participate in the PME process. The objective of the step is to include stakeholders for whom the development intervention is planned for. If the stakeholders participate in PME process, they will realize their needs, and the impact of the needs on them. Both males and females can be included but the focus should be on more participation by women	Considering this step, the organization decided to include both male and female members. The reason was that the women should be sensitized that their health affects the health of the entire family. Men were included because they need to be made aware about the health needs of the women and how the improvement in the nutritional status would impact them economically. Once the participants are decided, next is to decide how the community members would like to measure the impact of the intervention- what is the improvement in the nutritional health of the women
Step 2 (Gathering data)	Once the participants are decided, then methods of PME are decided. Methods like structured interviews (survey), group discussions, mapping, etc. can be used to collect data.	The community members chose to do structured interviews with all the women in the community and studied: - Prevalence of diseases among women during the nutritional intervention - Number of anaemic women during the intervention - Number of households who have started growing vegetables at home - Steps being taken by the household members to improve the nutritional status of the women
Step 3 (Analysing data)	The third step in PME is analyzing the data collected, which was collected in step – 2.	When data is collected, a discussion on possible causes and ways forward takes place. - Less no. of women attending training - men often discourage women to go for training - No change in the daily food pattern - male in the family decides the menu for daily food. - More anemic women reported
Step 4 (Sharing the information and defining actions to be taken)	Post the data analysis, the information is shared with all community members, to define the actions to be taken.	After analysis the data, records of the observations are made and the information is shared with the group members and other people in the village. The improved action will be to involve males in the training to change their behaviour.

- PME creates trust in local government policy and action (provided that the stakeholders' input is genuinely taken into account).
- The process of PME contributes to the learning of all involved.

Limitations of PME:

- Effective participator monitoring and evaluation process needs skilled facilitator to ensure everyone understands the process and is equally involved.
- The process of PME can be dominated by strong voices in the community. For example, men dominate women in discussions, political, cultural or religious leaders dominating discussions and decision making.
- It requires good communication skills.
- It is a time consuming process.
- It is not always easy to conduct as it require commitment from stakeholders and project implementing staff.
- PME needs the support of donors.
- Most of the time, focus is given on only participation in one aspect of the evaluation process, e.g. data collection.

Conclusion:

Participatory monitoring and evaluation can be summarized as a process which entails active involvement of local people in the design, collection, analysis and utilization of M&E information. The need for PME rose because the conventional approach of top-down development and centralized planning was not effective to solve the problems of rural people to a significant extent. If PME process is conducted by considering the principles and by using different tools of participatory monitoring and evaluation, it can help in improving the life of people.

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