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Approaches to
MONITORING

MODULE

Approaches to Monitoring

OUTLINES

Introduction

Unit 1: Progress and Process Monitoring

Unit 2: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Unit 3: Monitoring without Indicators using the Most Significant Change technique

Assignments

References /Further Readings

Objectives

At the completion of the module you will be able to:

- Understand and explain the definition and key concept of progress and performance monitoring
- Understand the definition and concept of Participatory Monitoring
- Explain the concept of Most Significant Change (MSC) and Outcome Mapping
- Understand and explain the key levers for ensuring quality of monitoring data

INTRODUCTION

In the previous modules you learnt how to develop a project PMP. In this module, you will learn about the different approaches that are adopted for monitoring a project, about progress and process monitoring, how monitoring can be done in a participative way while involving all project stakeholders, and how to conduct monitoring without using indicators.

1. PROGRESS AND PROCESS MONITORING

In this section, the practitioner will learn why progress and process monitoring are important, what the key differences between them are and how they can be implemented for monitoring a project.

PROGRESS MONITORING

Progress monitoring, as the name suggests, aims to assess the progress of a project towards its objectives and target milestones. It is advisable to do progress monitoring concurrently or intermittently along with the project implementation to ensure that the project is on track. Progress monitoring is an ongoing process which involves collecting and analyzing the output level or even outcome level indicators related to the project to see if the project is on track to deliver its planned results.

Taking the example of a project which aims to eradicate OD and improve sanitation by building individual household latrines (IHHL) in the project area, one lakh HHs are identified without toilets using a baseline study. The project aims to cover this deficit over a period of five years. During the project planning stage, it was decided that the project would build ten thousand toilets in the first year, twenty thousand in the second year, twenty-five thousand in the third and the fourth year respectively and twenty thousand in the fifth year.

In this case, through progress monitoring, a tab can be kept concurrently on the number of toilets that are constructed per year. Through progress monitoring, the number of toilets constructed is assessed and then it needs to be seen if the project can achieve the numbers it has planned to achieve. Based on this, feedback is provided to the project implementers to check whether the project is on track or whether it is lagging. In progress monitoring, the focus is more on the quantity of target achievement in comparison to its quality.

Project MIS (Management Information System) data is generally the source of data required for progress monitoring. This should ideally be done by the project management team itself.

PROCESS MONITORING

Process monitoring, as the name suggests, includes monitoring of the processes and the activities done as part of the project implementation. Its objective is to focus on the quality of the implementation

rather than focusing only on the targets or the milestones achieved by the project. As an initial step, the processes that need to be adopted for implementation of each project activity are delineated and listed. Activity-wise, this is an ideal process and sequence in which each activity that is to be implemented is first envisaged so that the desired results are achieved. A process intensive approach is required for ensuring quality and sustainability of project outcomes.

A process check-list is developed by making a list of all the steps that are followed as part of the ideal process implementation. Process monitoring is usually done using these process checklists. The activities and the processes are observed and recorded on the checklist. In case any deviation is observed from the ideal required process, it is recorded.

For example, to monitor the process of subsidy transfer to beneficiaries for construction of IHHL, at first, all the steps are listed in a sequential order.

1. The beneficiary should take the required photographs of the toilet site before, during and after its construction.

2. Get the toilet constructed.

3. Go to the project district office and intimate them about the toilet construction and get the form for availing subsidy.

4. Fill the form requesting for the subsidy amount and attach the following documents:
a. Three photographs of the various stages of toilet construction as mentioned above.
b. Identification card of the beneficiary to prove that the beneficiary is a resident of the mentioned area.
c. A verification letter from the *sarpanch* that the beneficiary's HH does not have a toilet.
d. Bank account number in the name of the beneficiary.

5. The form is submitted to the district project office after being duly filled.

6. The subsidy should be transferred to the beneficiary's account within 15 days of the receipt of the application form at the district office.

Based on the above-mentioned steps, a checklist for process monitoring is prepared. Using this check-list as a reference, the processes that need to be followed as part of the project activity are monitored. Deviation from the ideal process is also recorded. As part of process monitoring, the reason for this deviation is assessed and the feedback is given to the project management for improvement of the programme.

2. PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Participatory M&E, as the name suggests, is a process through which all the project stakeholders at various levels are engaged in monitoring and evaluating a project or a programme. Unlike conventional M&E, in participatory M&E, all stakeholders of the project including donors, implementation agencies, primary stakeholders and other stakeholders share control over the process, content and results of the M&E activity. Also, all stakeholders are involved in identifying or taking corrective action in case any issues or deviation is observed (Forster, 2002).

Participatory M&E's core principle is that it considers the project beneficiaries as active participants and not just information providers. It believes that their capacities should be built so that they can be actively engaged in analyzing and reflecting on the project performance so that the performance can be improved based on the inputs from the ground. During participatory M&E, all stakeholders are engaged throughout all stages of the M&E, which include formulating the M&E framework, information collection, collation, analysis, interpretation and finally, decision making.

WHY IS PARTICIPATORY M&E NECESSARY?

Why is Participatory M&E (PM&E) necessary and what are its advantages? Engaging all stakeholders has increasingly been considered as important for the M&E process as it offers new ways of assessment and deriving learning from the project. PM&E makes the M&E process more inclusive i.e., internal and contextual to the programme and also more responsive to the needs and expectations of the primary stakeholders of the project.

PM&E aims not only to measure the effectiveness of a project but also ensures accountability to its beneficiaries and increases transparency in the M&E process of the project. Making the process participatory empowers the project beneficiaries and inculcates a sense of ownership amongst the stakeholders of the project. Also, making the process participatory buttresses the process of formulating corrective action for improving the performance and outcomes of the project. PM&E also helps to build the beneficiaries' commitment and increases their understanding of the design, planning and implementation of the project.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING PARTICIPATORY M&E

Key steps involved in conducting PM&E are:

Step I: Identify the Key Stake holders

As the first step, all the stakeholders in the project, right from the project funders, project implementers, government agencies, other key boundary partners and its target beneficiaries are identified to be included in the M&E process.

Step II: Developing a framework for PM&E

After identifying the key stakeholders, the next step is to develop a framework for PM&E. This is one of the most important and challenging stages as it involves getting all the stakeholders together on board for the first time to provide their inputs, raise their concerns and expectations from the process (Gaventa). At this stage, the objective of the PM&E is established. Usually there are lot of deliberations and negotiations between the stakeholders at this stage. This process can answer key fundamental questions like:

- What are the resources and limitations at hand for the PM&E?
- What is the role and the responsibility of each stake holder?
- What information is required?
- From whom is this information to be collected?
- How is it to be incorporated to improve the programme implementation?

Step III: Developing the Indicators and Performance Monitoring Plan

As in the case of conventional M&E, after formulating the objective, the next step is to develop the indicators at each level of the Results Chain and define them fully. While developing the indicators in PM&E, special thought needs to be given to who the end users of this information are, and how it can be used to further improve the programme. The indicators should be developed keeping in mind the SMART criteria which was elucidated in previous modules
.
Subsequently, the project PMP and the matrix will be developed as it has been done in Chapter 4. All the stakeholders are jointly involved in developing the PMP. Also, the responsibilities are distributed among all stakeholders including the beneficiaries, unlike in the case of the conventional M&E.

Step IV: Collecting Data

After the objective and framework are finalised, the next critical step is to determine how to go ahead with the data collection. For this, the tools and techniques used for data collection are identified. A wide range of tools is available for this and a tool based on the context and requirements of the project is selected. After the tool is selected, the actual process of data collection is started. In the PM&E framework, it is already detailed who will do the data collection.

Step V: Data Analysis

The next step after the data collection is to analyze this collected data. Unlike in conventional M&E where analysis is usually done by a third party or by funders or implementers of the project, in PM&E, all stakeholders, including the project beneficiaries, are involved in conducting the data analysis. Workshops or joint meetings are conducted in which all stakeholders analyze the data collectively, mull

over the problems and constraints in achieving the project objective, look for solutions and examine the results of the project activities.

Step VI: **Programme Reporting and Feedback**

After the data is analyzed and insights derived from it, the last step is to document and report the process and the information generated from the PM&E process. It is also very important to share and disseminate this information to all stakeholders and relevant external audience. Based on the insights derived from this process, feedback and recommendations are given to the project implementation team for further improvement and course correction.

LIMITATIONS

Though there are various advantages in conducting PM&E, there are also some practical limitations while applying the same. Conducting a participatory evaluation which fulfils the core objectives requires a lot of commitment and focus from the donors and the implementers. Conducting such an evaluation is very resource intensive, both in terms of time and finance. Moreover, adept professionals are required to facilitate this kind of process.

3. MONITORING WITHOUT INDICATORS USING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE TECHNIQUE

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is a participatory technique that is used in both monitoring and evaluation. It was invented by Rick Davis in an attempt to meet some of the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development programme (Davis, 2005). This programme, run by the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), had diversity in both implementation and outcomes. MSC is a participatory technique in which all stake holders are first involved in deciding the criteria of change to be recorded, then in collecting these stories of change and lastly, in analyzing them. It is essentially a type of monitoring tool as this activity is done through the project cycle to provide feedback to programme managers about the direction of the programme. MSC also contributes to the evaluation as it provides information about the project i.e., whether it is moving towards achieving its intended long term results while commenting on the effectiveness of the programme.

The process involves collection of significant change (SC) stories from the grassroots level. The MSC stories are then shortlisted by the panel of designated stakeholders or the project team. Subsequently, various representatives sit together and read out these SC stories and further discuss the value of these stories. When should MSC be used?

While learning about a technique, it is of utmost importance to know when the technique should be used and when it should not be used. Effectiveness or suitability of MSC for a programme depends upon the programme context, its objective and its implementation strategy. MSC is suitable for programmes that:

- Are complex and have multiple outcomes
- Aim at creating behaviour and social change
- Struggle with conventional monitoring systems.

MSC is more suitable for monitoring because it is focused on deriving learning for the improvement of the programme rather than just its accountability.

The MSC technique is implemented in the programme using the ten steps formulated by Rick Davis in 2005. They are:

1. Getting started: Establishing champions and getting familiar with the approach. This step includes introducing this technique to the key people and groups and convincing them how useful it can be for the programme while being easy to implement. After all stakeholders have agreed to adopt this technique then the champions, who will act as facilitators and catalysts to involve others and further facilitate the process, need to be identified.

2. Establishing the domains of change: The second step is to identify the domains of change in the programme, which are broad categories in which SC stories are identified. Unlike in conventional M&E where the indicators need to be SMART, domains of change are left open ended and fuzzy so that different stakeholders can interpret them in their own way.

3. Defining the reporting period: The next step is to define the period or frequency of collecting and reporting these stories. This period could vary from a fortnight to a year depending on the rigour required by the programme team and donors, although quarterly reporting is considered the most common.

4. Collecting stories of change: The next critical step is collecting these stories of SC by asking the respondents what according to them has been the MSC that the project has brought about in the quality of life of its intended beneficiaries. These stories are captured in different ways by fieldworkers during work, through interviews conducted by people designated for the purpose, through group discussions or by encouraging beneficiaries to write their stories directly etc. The key information documented includes the background information of the person who collected the story, the context of the story, the narrative, and why the storyteller thinks this story describes a SC.

5. Reviewing the stories within the organizational hierarchy: The next step is to review and shortlist the most significant stories from the pool of stories collected. The stories are reviewed by a group of people who select the most significant stories amongst them and forward them to their seniors in the hierarchy. It is very important to decide and document the criteria, the process, and the people involved in the process.

6. Providing stakeholders with regular feedback about the review process: As an objective that is imperative in any MLE tool, MSC also aims at providing useful feedback to the project team. Information regarding the MSC observed on the field is fed back into the system. This helps the team in handling the programme to qualitatively understand the perceived significant changes that have been brought into the people's lives. This feedback is provided using different methods like formal reports, newsletters, seminars or through public meetings etc.

7. Verifying the authenticity of stories if necessary: As a lot of stories are collected, there is merit in verifying some of them. Getting details would help to ensure that the reported stories are authentic. Also, if a process of verification is put in place, people who are collecting these stories will be more careful while collecting them. Before verifications are made, it is decided, who will do the verification, what content will be verified, how many verifications will be done etc.

8. Quantification: Though MSC focuses on reporting qualitative change, there is also scope for reporting quantification of change using three methods. The first is at the level of the individual story, in which the number of people involved in that activity, the amount of spent, the amount of money that was saved etc. is considered. The second way of quantification is by quantifying the frequency of instances where this change got selected and the MSC was observed. The third way of quantification is to collect all the SC stories, and amongst them, to keep a count of the number of times a specific type of change was observed.

9. Conducting secondary analysis of the stories: Besides doing the participatory selection and analysis of the stories, additional analysis is done which includes secondary analysis and meta-monitoring of data. Though this is not a mandatory step under MSC, the information generated could be useful in making the process more rigorous. Both these techniques involve analyzing the complete set of SC stories. Secondary analysis involves going through the SC stories and then classifying and analyzing them. Meta-monitoring involves analyzing all the SC stories based on the attributes of the study. This macro level monitoring involves finding out about the number of SC stories written during each reporting period, identifying the people who had written these stories, recognizing whether there was any pattern in the stories that got selected and if any action had been taken based on these stories etc.

10. Revising the MSC process: The last step is to revise the MSC process for the next rounds based on the feedback and learnings, while or after the first round has been conducted. The change could be

related to any of the steps from 1 to 9 that have been explained above. The change could be related to the stories collected, the frequency at which the stories were reported, it could be associated with the people involved in the story collection, the method of analysis and shortlisting of stories, providing feedback to the programme based on the MSC process and so on. The aim of reviewing is to improve the MSC post after every round of implementation.

ASSIGNMENT

Discuss approaches to monitoring

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