

An Exploration of the Guiding Principles, Importance and Challenges of Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Development Projects and Programmes

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Abstract

In sociology, there is interdependence between social problems and research. Monitoring and Evaluation is an extension of social research. This paper analyses the purposes and steps in monitoring of community development projects/programmes. Using desk review and his wide experiences in M&E of community development projects, the writer analyses the importance and challenges of monitoring and evaluating development projects. Various approaches, principles, techniques, purposes and importance of project/programme monitoring and evaluation are discussed. The paper concludes that M&E is part of ensuring project accountability and ensuring projects meet the intended purpose. However M&E neither present the total picture of effectiveness of development projects nor is it a panacea for the challenges facing development projects. Given that M&E has become one of the most important topics in community development studies and in programme planning and project management, this paper provides an important implications in community development theory and practice.

Keywords: Monitoring, Evaluation, Projects, Programmes, Community Development

1.0 Meaning of Project/Programme Monitoring

Monitoring is defined as a continuous assessment both of the functioning of the project activities in the context of implementation schedules and of the use of project inputs by targeted population in the context of design expectations. It is an internal project activity, an essential part of day to day management (Casley and Kumar, 1987). According to Valadez, J. and Bamberger, M. (2004), monitoring is a program activity of program management, the purpose of which is to determine whether programs or projects have been implemented as planned. Monitoring involves the provision of regular feedback on the progress of a project implementation and the problems facing project implementation. Kunwar and Nyandemo (2004) define project monitoring as “a continuous function involving the day to day operation during the implementation of a project. It is a routine measurement of program input/ activities and output- procurement, delivery and implementation plans, resources, adherence to implementation of projects, compliance with required procedures and achievement of the planned targets.”

According to World Bank (2011), Monitoring is a continuous function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. Simply stated, monitoring refers to collecting information on a project regularly and analyzing it to find out how it is progressing. In doing this we collect quantitative data, hard facts such as how much money and time has been spent on a project; and also qualitative data such as whether the project is progressing smoothly and whether participants are satisfied with the project.

1.1 Purposes of Monitoring of Community Development Projects/Programmes

Monitoring activities are undertaken to achieve the following purposes:

- To indicate at the earliest instance any shortcomings with regard to achieving intended objectives so that ameliorative measures can be undertaken in good time(Kunwar, D. Singh and Nyandemo, 2004)
- To monitor the development of the project as a whole, and its component projects, in relation to changes in the context and circumstances of their implementation.
- To implement a rapid problem identification system as well as a system for internal communications to the various stakeholders.

- To facilitate evaluation process during and after activities, through the definition of specific indicators.
- It is used as a tool to help planners initiate new projects.
- To determine whether existing interventions should be strengthened or discarded
- To facilitate continuous improvement in the project
- To assess the overall effectiveness and efficiency of social interventions in terms of their outputs, outcomes, costs and impacts; and where necessary, to determine the catalytic effects and sustainability of such projects.

1.2 Steps in Monitoring a Community Development Project/Programme

The following are the steps in monitoring a community development project:

1. Preparing a Logical Framework

The first step in monitoring procedure is a careful description of objectives and also the work plan. This involves defining project objectives in measurable terms. This involves defining the:

- Content or objectives and the target group
- Costs Time frame

2. Explication of the premises underlying the project plan.

Those premises that should be formulated include:

- The function of the project.
- The inter-linkages between various project components.
- The influence of the external factors.
- How the project intend to further the attainment of overall goals of development

3. Selection of indicators of project outcomes

Stem *etal* (2005) defines indicators as “the variables used to measure progress towards goals” Indicators of project performance and outcome depend on the objectives pursued and the strategies adopted which vary from program to program. Kunwar and Nyandemo (2004) points out that indicators are useful when the following requirements are fulfilled:

- The indicators selected for measuring the outcomes of integrated socio-economic development program must be sensitive to development on the local level since the primary objective of these programs are to improve the living standard of the specific target group or areas.
- The indicators must vary with the program aspects they are supposed to measure. That is, the progress made in program implementation or attainment of objectives.
- They must be objective which means they must be directly observable and measurable.
- The indicators should also be simple, that is, the data on them should be readily available.

4. Specifying information requirement

Data that is necessary for rational decision making on the project should be collected. Data collecting techniques used include in-depth interviews, standardized questionnaire interviews, direct observation, participant observation, focus group discussion, record keeping by participants themselves and physical measurements.

5. Timing of research

This relates to when and how often to collect the data necessary to provide information during the monitoring process.

6. Analyzing and reporting findings

Analyzing findings is very important as this is where the outcome is known. Reporting on the other hand is communicating the monitoring results. Reporting is one of the most crucial phases in the monitoring process.

7. Using the findings

The emphasis at this stage recognizes that the findings are not simply in generating results based information but in getting that information to the appropriate users in the system in a timely fashion so that they can take the information into account in the management of the project.

1.3 Importance of Monitoring Community Development Projects/Programmes

Monitoring plays a key role in community development process. According to Casley and Kumar (1987) its importance includes the following:

- Monitoring aims at providing managers, decision makers and other stakeholders with regular feedback on progress in implementation and results and early indicators of problems that need to be corrected. Project monitoring provides regular feedback which in turn can be used to better inform key decision makers, the public as well as other stakeholders.
- A monitoring system is as an observation system for the project managers which helps them verify whether the project activities are happening according to planning and whether means are used in a correct and efficient manner. The system must supply the project management with a continuous flow of information throughout the course of the project to make it possible to take the right decisions.
- Monitoring is a continuous process of collecting and analyzing data to compare how well a project is being implemented against expected results.
- Monitoring can be conducted throughout the lifecycle of a project including after completion to provide information that is very useful internally. For the managers who are striving to achieve results, the information from monitoring concerning the progress, performance and problems facing the project are vital to them.
- Monitoring can help project managers identify program weaknesses and therefore take action to improve them.
- Monitoring promotes transparency and accountability within organization, society and government. External and internal stakeholders will have a clear sense of the status of projects, programs or policies.

1.4 Challenges of Monitoring Community Development Projects/Programmes

Monitoring of community development projects is a challenging exercise. The main challenges include the following:

- Monitoring information is a necessary but not sufficient input to the conduct of rigorous evaluations. While monitoring information can be collected and used for ongoing management purposes, reliance on such information on its own can introduce distortions because it typically covers only certain dimensions of a project's or program's activities, and careful use of this information is needed to avoid unintended behavioral incentives. One approach is to rely on monitoring information to identify potential problem issues requiring more detailed investigation via an evaluation.
- Methodological problems may be experienced in the data collection stage where preference may be to the use of quantitative rather than qualitative methods.
- Donor agencies have considerable influence on the outcome of the monitoring process. These monitoring systems are based on a set of quantified physical and financial indicators, many of which are not entirely appropriate for social development projects since their output are not easy to identify or measure.
- Sometimes it is very difficult to assess the link between the policy outputs and the production of desired impacts. For example infant mortality, school performance or household income are affected by many factors that it is extremely difficult to isolate the contribution of a particular policy. The contribution becomes even more difficult to monitor when programs have broad objectives such as alleviating poverty or improving the social and economic participation of women.
- There is also a challenge in gathering, storing and using information that serves different levels of assessment. Monitoring should be multifunctional so that information generated at one level is useful at the next. Monitoring should also go beyond checking just whether events as taking place as planned.
- Non-participatory monitoring will affect the findings since there is lack of commitment, ownership, follow-up and feedback on performance. There must be participation by outcome groups, through stakeholder meetings, steering committees and focus group interviews.
- Poor design of the monitoring hampers the monitoring process. If the process is poorly designed or based on faulty assumptions, its success will be difficult to realize.

2.0 Definition of Project/Programme Evaluation

It is often difficult to distinguish between monitoring and evaluation. Project evaluation is the process of assessing projects and the product of that analysis.

It is intended to draw lessons to improve projects, programmes, or policy and practice and to enhance accountability. It is a selective exercise that attempts to systematically and objectively assess progress towards and the achievement of an outcome. It is an exercise involving assessments of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time in response to evolving needs for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve an outcome (UNDP, 2002).

According to Spicker (2008), projects are evaluated mainly by scrutinizing evidence in order to be able to make some judgements about them. Spicker argues that the first thing that one needs to do in order to evaluate a programme is to establish some sort of criterion by which it can be judged. He says that the sorts of criteria which are most often used are fairly straightforward and may involve such questions as:

- Does this project meet the needs?
- Does it have other benefits?
- Is it worth what it costs? This is called the cost- benefit analysis.

According to Rossi, P.H, *et al*, (1999), evaluation is the use of social research procedures to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs that is adapted to their political and organisational environments and designed to inform social action in ways that improve social conditions. Dinnito and Due (1987) argues that evaluation is the assessment of the overall effectiveness of a program in meeting its objectives, or the assessment of the relative effectiveness of two or more programs in meeting common objectives. According to Theodoulou and Kofinis (2004) evaluation can be defined as a process by which general judgements about quality, goal attainment, program effectiveness, impact and costs can be determined. They say that the consequences of policy programs are determined by describing their impacts, or by looking at whether they have succeeded or failed according to a set established standards. Evaluation can therefore be conceptualised as a review of the whole project in order to assess its overall value and effects. It is carried out when the project is complete and the evaluator can at times use the information or data collected during the monitoring process.

2.1 Differences between Monitoring and Evaluation

Project evaluation is an appraisal of a plan or projects performance which is undertaken either at periodic intervals (often at the end of stages) during the implementation stage when it may be called ongoing evaluation, at formative stage to inform the ongoing implementation and decision making or after implementation when the plan or project has been implemented. This makes it difficult for us to distinguish between project monitoring and project evaluation since in carrying out monitoring we are also evaluating the project. The difference between monitoring and evaluation are highlighted below.

Differences between M&E	Monitoring	Evaluation
Timing	Monitoring is a continuing function that takes place throughout the implementation of a project/programme	Evaluation is assessing the entire project cycle.
Depth and Purpose	Monitoring is a regular part of a project or programme management. It focuses on the implementation of the project comparing what is delivered with what is planned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reviews the achievements of the project/programme and considers whether the plan was the best one to achieve. • Evaluation measures achievement, as well as positive /negative and intended/unintended effects • Evaluation looks for lessons to be learned from both success and lack of success, and also looks for best practices which can be applied elsewhere.
Who conducts	Monitoring is usually done by people directly involved in implementing the project/ programme	Evaluation is best conducted by an independent outsider who can be impartial in consulting with project/programme staff.

Source: Unodc.org

2.2 Approaches to Project/Programme Evaluation

According to Dinnito, D.M, and Due R.T (1987), a rational approach to evaluation includes:

- Identifying and ranking program goals and objectives. This is where the goals of the program are identified and ranked.
- Developing units to measure the goals identified. This is where measures are devised to describe progress towards the identified goals.
- Identify the target situation or a group for which the program or policy was designed.
- Identifying non-target groups who might be affected indirectly by the program, which they termed as “spill over” effects and non-target groups who are similar to the target groups but did not participate in the program or receive its direct benefits (control groups).
- Measure program effects on target and non-target groups over as long a period of time as possible.
- Identify and measure cost of the program in terms of all resources allocated to it.
- Identify and measure the indirect costs of the program including the loss of opportunity to pursue other activities.

2.3. Purposes of Evaluation

According to UNDP (2002), the purposes of evaluation include:

- To Improve performance and achieve results
- To measure and assess performance in order to more effectively manage the outcomes and outputs development results.
- It focuses on assessing the contribution of various factors to a given development outcome with such factors including outputs, partnerships, policy advice and dialogue, advocacy and brokering/ coordination.
- Managers apply the information given evaluation to improve strategies, programs and other activities.
- Evaluation focuses on assessing inputs and implementation process.
- To determine whether an implemented program is doing what it is supposed to.
- To determine whether the effects of the project are intended or unintended and whether the results are positive or negative to the target.

2.4 Importance of Evaluation

Evaluation is aimed at accomplishing the following:-

- To assess the relative success of programs in meeting the stated objectives.
- To identify what can be improved in the plan or program.

The basis of policy or program evaluation is to compare whether the outcome is in line with the normative standards. That is, the expected standards.

It is at the time of evaluation that we ask ourselves whether all went on well. The central question is what happened as a result of the intervention strategy that would not have happened in its absence.

- Evaluation is important in that we learn from experience so that what is planned for the future is better than what went on before.
- Evaluation looks at the quality of what actually happens on the grounds. It looks at whether specific objectives have been achieved and the impact on the target group.
- Evaluation is also important in that it exposes the unintended consequences of a project, programme or policy. A project can be implemented but may bring consequences which policy makers may not have foreseen.
- Project evaluation assist policy makers and managers in solving problems through the determination of what program strategies work best under what conditions and the potential impediments.
- Evaluation helps the stakeholders in the decision making. Results of the evaluation are used to make informed decision on how to improve the program to serve the people more effectively especially during the next project cycle.
- Evaluation is done to inform the program manager on the program performance to be used for program control, planning and accountability.

- Policy evaluation is carried out to inform the funding and regulatory agencies whether the needs of the beneficiaries are being met.
- It also contributes to the application of other policy analytic methods, including problem structuring and recommendation. Information about adequate policy performance may contribute to the restructuring of policy problems, for instance by showing that goals and objectives should be redefined. Evaluation can also contribute to the definition of new or revised policy alternatives by showing that a previously favoured policy alternative should be abandoned and replaced with another one.
- Evaluation also enables the government to understand and appreciate the political, economic and socio-cultural environment in which public policy operates. This will in turn enable the concerned organizations to take the necessary steps to mitigate the undesirable consequences of these environmental factors.
- Evaluation contributes to the clarification and critique of the value that underlie the selection of goals and objectives.

2.5 Types of Project/Programme Evaluation

Theodoulou and Kofinis (2004) identify four generic types of the most commonly used evaluation typologies and they are:

- Process evaluation
- Outcome evaluation
- Impact evaluation
- Cost-benefit evaluation

Process Evaluation

As the name suggests, process evaluation is a type of evaluation that analyzes how well a project, policy or a program is being administered. It is a type of evaluation mostly employed by managers to determine what can be done to improve the implementation, the aspects of service delivery of the program. This type does not address whether or not the policy or program is achieving the desired outcome or impact on the target population. The process of carrying out this type of evaluation takes the following stages:

- Determine why a project or a program is at the current level.
- Identify any problem(s) faced in the implementation process.
- Develop solutions to the problem(s)
- Improve project performance by recommending how solutions should be implemented and evaluated once carried out.

Outcome Evaluation

Theodoulou and Kofinis state that outcome evaluation is concerned with outputs. For example, if the stated goal of a project is to reduce the number of people receiving welfare benefits, then a determination is made to see if less people are receiving welfare benefits after program implementation than before. However, this type of evaluation does not indicate what happened to the people who used to receive the welfare benefits and who have been forced off the system because they are no longer eligible. Did they find employment? Did they find other means of charity? Have they migrated to a life of crime? Outcome evaluation as described by Theodoulou and Kofinis focuses more on the readily available and tangible results of a project. Outcome evaluation is normally considered to be the impact that a project has on a target population, for example, did the project produce the desired behavioral change initially sought (Theodoulou and Kofinis, 2004).

Impact Evaluation

The objective of this type of evaluation is to determine whether or not a given project is achieving the intended impact as visualized by the various actors who either supported or opposed the project. Using the welfare example once again as discussed above this type of evaluation would answer the question what happened to the people who used to receive the welfare benefits and who have been forced off the system because they are no longer eligible. Did they find employment? Did they find other means of charity? Have they migrated to a life of crime? In comparison with outcome evaluation, impact evaluation is concerned with assessing whether the target population is being affected in any way by the introduction and implementation of the project. Impact evaluation is also concerned with the impact of the program on the original problem being addressed, for it is important for both project level managers and project designers to ascertain whether target populations are appropriately receiving delivery of a program (Theodoulou and Kofinis, 2004).

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Simply stated, a cost-benefit analysis is the comparison of the costs associated with a project to the benefits generated by the project. Continuing with the welfare example cited above, the tangible cost of a new project with a goal to reduce the number of welfare recipients could be accurately evaluated to include agency operating costs and the actual monetary cost of the benefits that are provided to welfare recipients. Project evaluators must be aware that the costs and benefits used in any evaluation may not accurately represent the real impact of a given policy or program. Instead, a cost-benefit analysis should be employed as one of several methods used to determine the effectiveness of the project.

2.6 Guiding Principles in Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Projects/Programmes

Rossi *et al.*, (1999), have identified the following as the guiding principles in evaluation:

- **Systematic Inquiry**

Evaluator conducts a systematic, data based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated. They should adhere to the highest appropriate technical standards in conducting their work to increase the accuracy and credibility of the evaluative information they produce. They should communicate their methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret and critique their work.

- **Competence**

Evaluators should possess the education abilities, skills, and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation. They should practice within the limits of their professional training and competence and should conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits. They should seek to improve their competencies in order to provide the highest level of performance in their evaluation through workshops, self study, evaluation of one's own practice and working with other evaluators to learn from their skills and experience.

- **Honesty**

Evaluators should negotiate honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders in issues to do with costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and the uses of data resulting from a specific evaluation. They should also record the changes made in the originally negotiated project plans, and the reason(s) why the changes were made and determine client's interests concerning the conduct and the outcome of the evaluation. They should not misrepresent their procedures, data or findings. Evaluators should also disclose all sources of financial support for an evaluation, and the source of the request for evaluation.

- **Respect for people**

Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self worth of the respondents, program participants, clients and other stakeholders with whom they interact. The evaluators should conduct evaluation and communicate its results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholder's dignity and self worth. Evaluators must abide by current professional ethics and standards regarding risks, harms and burdens that might be endangered to those participating in the evaluation; ensure informed consent for participation in evaluation; and informing participants about the scope and limits of confidentiality. They should identify and respect differences among participants, such as differences in their culture, religion, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity and they should be mindful of potential implications of these differences when planning, conducting, analyzing and reporting their evaluations.

- **Responsibilities for general and public welfare**

Evaluators should articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values related to the general and public welfare. When planning and reporting evaluations, evaluators should consider including important perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders in the object being evaluated. They should consider not only the immediate operations and outcomes of whatever is being evaluated but also the broad assumption, implication and potential side effects.

2.7 Techniques of M&E of Community Development Projects/Programmes

Broadly speaking there are two main techniques of evaluation. These are: quantitative techniques and qualitative techniques. Specifically we can evaluate projects using different techniques. They include

- *Survey methods* – This is where we develop questionnaires and proceed to the field to find out how a project is proceeding.

- *Rapid assessment* – This is where we do a rapid appraisal or assessment of how a program is proceeding.
- *Focus Group discussion* – A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic- in this case the project. This is where we discuss with stakeholders how a project is proceeding.
- *In-depth analysis* – This is where we analyse single cases in details and identify how successful they are.
- *Cost effective analysis* – This is where we use evaluative techniques with the aim of reducing the cost of the evaluation.
- *Comparative case studies* – This is where we compare different projects and find out which one is doing better than the other and why.
- *Risk analysis*- It is done by establishing risk in each activity.

3.0 Conclusion

Most organizations nowadays acknowledge the importance of monitoring and evaluation and they indeed budget for it when designing the project. M&E is part of ensuring projects' accountability. Given the challenges cited in the paper M&E may not present the total picture of effectiveness of community development projects. However, M&E is important because it indicates how far the project complied with the intended goals. More importantly, M&E helps in the improvement of ongoing projects and it assists project implementers to ensure that mistakes committed in a project are not repeated in the same or in similar project.

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