

Paperwork or people?

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EVERYONE HAS SEEN conventional project monitoring and evaluation in progress, and probably even been involved in the various tasks associated with it, such as drawing up long lists of indicators, questions and facts to check, making up the monitoring format and then the endless tedious task of actually filling in the forms on site. There's usually too little time to do the job, usually a backlog of sites to visit, and after all that, there's the reporting to do back in the office. It's not surprising that monitoring is the least liked task of all those connected in a water and sanitation project. It's just not fun to do at all, and it rarely generates any credit for the poor unfortunate who has to do it. It creates huge piles of paper, which collect dust somewhere at the back of the office as part of the essential project record-keeping.

This kind of monitoring is essentially "abstractive"; it is done by project staff, who want to get a picture for the project of how things are going, what progress is or is not being made, and it seldom has much to do with what the project stakeholders, the end-users really want. Too often, while what the project wants is dealt with, what the people who are actually using (and paying for) the faci-

ties want, does not get acknowledged. Least of all do the women of the area get a chance to say what is working for them, let alone get involved in the monitoring and evaluation process itself.

In a water supply and sanitation project in Kenya, where I have worked on the Community Development component, an alternative approach to monitoring and evaluation has been adopted. While different labels are used for the approaches,

PAME for Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, or BME for Beneficiary Monitoring and Evaluation, they all concern the same issue: how to make sure that the community being served by the improved water supply and sanitation can influence the course of project design and activities.

In the Kenya project, we brought in the idea of participatory monitoring, where the villagers themselves have taken on responsibility for checking progress, both for the water supply as well as for the sanitation components. In contrast to the usual pattern of a (usually) male project staff worker arriving in a cloud of dust on a motorbike, with an important-looking bag full of forms to complete, participatory monitoring is done mainly by one or more active women of the village, quietly in their own time, and with the use of pictures and illustrations, since although literate, they are not comfortable with writing and figures.

The monitoring chart shown in Figure 1 was drawn up together between the Water and Sanitation Committee (WSSC) of the village and project staff. It took a number of tries to get the drawings right, with the help of a local artist, but the time invested was well-spent, since the women involved in the monitoring process now feel that the monitoring booklet is "theirs" and are comfortable with its use.

The booklet is small and handy, and is made up of sections concerning the different project activities underway. For water and sanitation, all the relevant activities are listed with illustrations, with columns where progress can be shown. Figure 1 shows some of the activities related to the community organisation which has to be undertaken before the other activities can start. The booklet, however, is usually filled in only after all the information has been collected. The actual monitoring process itself is a much more social activity, carried out as the VRP goes about her usual work of hygiene training, calling in at different households, and sitting with mothers and children while going through hygiene flipcharts.

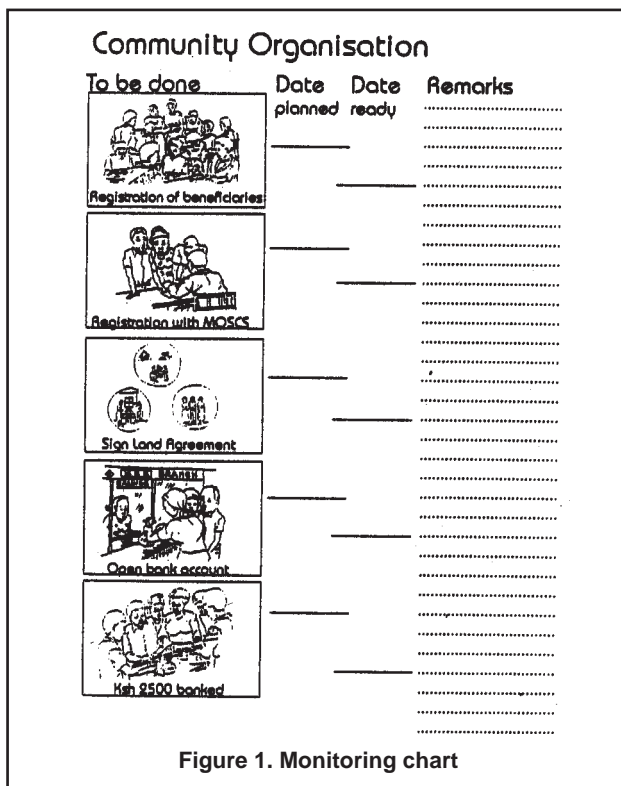


Figure 1. Monitoring chart

Participatory monitoring was introduced into the project on a pilot basis about a year ago in 1995, in one of the 6 Districts covered by the project as a whole. In each District a project team of extensionists, after training in participatory techniques, was then trained in how to extend the principle of monitoring by the villagers themselves. During the pilot phase, 5 sites were selected in the District. In each project village, there is a Village Resource Person (VRP), usually a woman, who has been selected by the WSSC to take care of hygiene promotion and awareness at the village level. The VRP carries out the monitoring under the supervision of the WSSC. Although in most cases the VRPs are literate, the monitoring form was specifically designed to include as many illustrations as possible, to prevent too much reliance on text, and to avoid it appearing too imposing and intimidating. The data is collected on a monthly basis by the VRP. The project staff member in charge of community development activities in the District then visits the village and discusses the information collected, which s/he then takes back to the District office. After data processing, the information is then passed on to the main Project office for incorporation into the project's database. Progress and problems are in this way reported on from the village point of view, and the causes of delays, interruptions and other hitches are seen from within the village context.

Participatory monitoring is carried on as a parallel activity with regular monitoring carried out by the project staff. The data collected is constantly cross-referenced with that collected during the conventional project monitoring process. It has taken some time to establish the system, since in the beginning, some confusion over the recording of figures and information occurred in the project villages. The pilot activities having been successfully completed, participatory monitoring was then extended to all 6 Districts in March 1996. The data collected at village level is reviewed by the project and the results are to be used for adjustments to design, and any changes in strategy needed.

The participatory monitoring in this project is part of the overall process approach adopted from the start of the second phase in 1991. A totally new approach was adopted both with regard to the technology to be used and to the way community development. To start with, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques were used to introduce the idea of improved domestic water supply and sanitation to villagers. The starting point was to get villagers to want to own the facilities, to take responsibility for them, and this has involved a very large investment

in training of project staff, in human resource development and institutional capacity building.

PRA at that time was not as well known as it is now, and had not previously been applied in water supply and sanitation projects, so a lot of brain-storming, collective sharing of experiences and "learning by doing" went into the first few years of the project. Training of project field staff in participatory approaches and methods took up the major part of the first years, with an associated change in "mind-set" for most of the fieldworkers. A number of hiccups and unanticipated events contributed to a bumpy ride in the beginning, but also to a rich experience which other projects in the area wanted to learn about. Throughout the project, the concept of participation took hold, so that also in the project field offices, a more democratic atmosphere has replaced the previous hierarchical pattern.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation then became a logical next step in the overall project planning.

In most projects there is usually a distinction made between "monitoring" and "evaluation". Through the adoption of a more participatory approach, in this project the dividing line has become blurred, and an ongoing process is taking place, through which progress is being monitored as well as evaluated, almost at the same time. Every month during the village WSSC meeting, the monitoring booklet is updated, and every three months, the WSSC holds an evaluation of the project during a general community meeting. All the information which has been collected from monitoring activities provides the base for this.

Although it is still too early to have achieved quantifiable changes in the project overall as a result of adopting participatory monitoring and evaluation, the process of "accountability" has been set in motion, in which the project has to answer to the end-users, the people, for its activities.

The huge piles of paper which used to accumulate in the District office after a monitoring "round" have now been reduced, as the task is now shared more equally between the parties involved, the project and the people it serves.

References and further reading

- Fawcett, B., Juppenlatz, L., and White J., 'Busoga Region borehole rehabilitation project, Uganda evaluation'. Evaluation report EV584, ODA. June 1995.
- D'arcy Davis Case. 'The community's coolbox: the idea methods and tools for participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation in community forestry', FAO, 1990.