Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Improving the Performance of Poverty Reduction Programs and Building Capacity of Local Partners

By Rolf Sartorius, Social Impact

"*Most of the time the outside experts fly in and out without taking the time to listen to the people. In this evaluation they really listened to us and respected our opinions--we all worked together to make the project stronger.*"   ---Local participant, Honduras forestry project evaluation

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) offers development organizations a host of opportunities for improving the performance of poverty alleviation programs and building the management capacity of local partners. While many agencies can evaluate poverty programs using outside "expert" approaches, few have the know-how and skills to employ PME approaches and fewer still are able to design and implement effective *PME systems*. PME approaches encompass a wide and expanding range of philosophies, tools and methodologies. For many agencies working in poverty alleviation there is great opportunity to strengthen programs by marrying PME with more traditional results-oriented approaches to program management.

This paper has four aims. First, it outlines the rationale for PME and distinguishes between participatory and conventional evaluation approaches. Second, it provides a simple framework and some practical guidance for designing and implementing practical PME systems for poverty alleviation programs. Third, it offers some practical tips for conducting PME during mid-term evaluations and project reviews. The paper concludes with several examples of PME/PME systems and a checklist for improving the design of PM&E systems.

I.   Rational for PME and Distinction from Conventional Approaches

Much has been said about the benefits of PME and this issue is also covered in the paper by J.Bradley Cousins as part of this conference. PME is widely recognized for its potential to:

- Improve the performance of development and poverty alleviation programs
- Enhance local learning, management capacity and skills
- Build partnerships and sense of local ownership over projects
- Build consensus among project staff and partners about project goals/objectives
- Provide timely, reliable, and valid information for management decision-making
- Increase cost-effectiveness of M&E information
- Empower local people to make their own decisions about the future

At the same time PME has substantial front-end transaction costs and longer-term resource requirements related to capacity building. PME is not a single philosophy, approach or methodology. Rather, it is a broad constellation of approaches and methods,

meaning different things to different people at different points in time, and it is highly context specific. Several practitioners distinguish between conventional and participatory M&E and the various types of PME. Narayan (1993) offers a useful summary of the differences between conventional and participatory evaluation approaches:

	Conventional Evaluation	Participatory Evaluation
Why	Accountability, usually summary judgements about the project to determine if funding continues	To empower local people to initiate, control and take corrective action
Who	External experts	Community members, project staff, facilitator
What	Predetermined indicators of success, principally cost and production output	People identify their own indicators of success
How	Focus on "scientific objectivity" distancing of evaluators from other participants; uniform complex procedures; delayed limited access to results	Self evaluation; simple methods adapted to local culture; open immediate sharing of results through local involvement in evaluation processes
When	Midterm and completion	Any assessment for program improvement; merging of monitoring and evaluation, hence frequent small evaluations

Within the realm of participatory evaluation Cousins and Whitmore (1999) posit two principle streams, practical participatory evaluation and transformative participatory evaluation. They compare these two streams on a set of dimensions relating to control, level and range of participation.

Feuerstein (1986) and Pretty (1994) distinguish between various kinds of evaluation based on the degree to which local evaluation stakeholders influence decisions about evaluation processes and the degree to which evaluation activities build local capacity for learning and collective action. In her work in community development Feuerstein poignantly describes four major approaches to evaluation: 1) "**Studying the specimens**"--community has limited, passive role; 2) "**Refusing to share results**"--community receives selected information/feedback; 3) "**Locking up the expertise**"--guided participatory evaluation; 4) **Partnership in development--**building capacity to do PME.

These frameworks help us to place PME activities along a continuum of participatory decision-making and they help us to see how and where we can deepen and expand participation in our M&E work related to poverty alleviation.

II.   Designing PME Systems

A good place to start with PME is to design PME systems for new poverty alleviation projects and programs. This is especially true for projects that have a philosophy of participatory management and partnership with local stakeholders. Designing PME systems into these projects during the inception stage will increase the likelihood that PME is not an afterthought, that PME is fully integrated in project operations and that important PME benefits, such as participatory learning and action aimed at project improvement, are realized throughout the project life.

Drawing on experience from many different programs and agencies we recommend a flexible and practical framework for designing PME systems.[1] A PME facilitator can work with stakeholders during project inception to develop the PME plan and later to provide training and capacity building support needed to implement the system. The approach includes four key elements:

1.   **A collaborative team approach**. A group made up of project and partner organization staff have shared responsibility for PME, not just one person. The team is comprised of key PM&E stakeholders--people who are committed to PME and who are willing to take responsibility for it. Individual roles and responsibilities for each team member are spelled out in the M&E plan.

2.   **The PME worksheet**. The centerpiece of the approach is a planning worksheet **derived from the project's LogFrame** used to assist the team to identify and organize the key information needed in the M&E plan. The project LogFrame helps stakeholders generate consensus on project objectives and especially higher level results. The PME facilitator works with stakeholders to elicit the LogFrame (or at a minimum the hierarchy of project objectives/logic model) and to define indicators that are practical and *important to the stakeholders*. In several PME workshops and planning meetings the facilitator helps the team to think carefully about the details of who will participate in each stage of PME, how information will be used to improve the project and how lessons will be shared. Decisions are reached by consensus and recorded on newsprint.

When we work with illiterate or semi-literate groups we use the worksheet loosely as a conceptual framework and substitute symbols and pictures for the written word. In this approach we draw heavily on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methods to support our PME system.

A key aspect of this approach is the identification of PME training needs, development of a detailed PME training plan and follow through with appropriate PME training and capacity building activities.

PME Planning Worksheet

PROJECT OBJECTIVES (Goal, Purpose, Outputs)	INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION						DATA ANALYSIS AND USE			
		Source of Info	Baseline Data Needed	Who is involved	Tools & Methods	How Often	Added Info Needed	How Often	Who is involved	How info is to be used	Who gets info

---

[1]See for example, Larson, P. and Svendsen, D. (1997) *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation.* World Wild Life Fund, Washington, DC.

3.   Annual project self assessments. Self-assessments using participatory workshops and data gathered through the participatory monitoring system are used on an annual basis. These provide a chance for reflecting on project activities and gaining insights on what aspects of the project have worked well, what aspects have not worked well, and why. Self assessments are conducted by project staff and partners and may or may not involve outside resource people. These workshops can be done in a 1-5 day format depending on the size and complexity of the project. The results of these sessions is a set of action plans for improving project performance. Performance Improvement Planning (PIP), highlighted in one of the cases below, is one methodology for this kind of assessment.

4.   A written PME plan. We encourage project teams to develop a brief, written PME plan through a series of planning meetings that all participants are aware of and agree on what will take place. Ideally, these meetings take place during project the start-up phase when the major stakeholders, including project staff, are in place. The plan describes how the activities in the PME worksheet will be carried out. It should include the following items:

•   description of the project's approach to PME and the process used to develop the PME plan
•   description of the key users of PME information and their specific information needs
•   list of PME team members and their responsibilities
•   PME training plan
•   annual implementation schedule
•   schedule of project reports, assessments and evaluations
•   project Logical Framework
•   budget for PME activities

As the plan begins to take shape, we often work with a local artist to produce illustrations that show how to use the simple PM&E tools. These pieces are put together into a basic set of operational guidelines for the PM&E team.

III.   Conducting Participatory Evaluations and Project Reviews

Although PME *systems* will not be practical for many projects, PME will be. If PME systems are in place then participatory evaluations will be a natural extension. Participatory evaluations can offer many of the benefits of PME systems, however, if taken as one time only events, they will do little to build a sustained capacity for local learning and collaborative action. Therefore, decisions about where PME should be introduced should be taken carefully, where it has the greatest potential to succeed with

adequate resourcing and political commitment. Following are several tips for more effective PME to support poverty alleviation programs.

1. Determine Whether PME is Appropriate for Your Program

Knowing the rationale for PME, the conditions necessary for PME, and the differences between conventional and participatory M&E, you are better able to assess whether PME systems are appropriate for your program and whether you are ready to support PME with adequate financial and human resources and political commitment. Remember that good PME work requires a commitment to empowering local people, relinquishing some control, using simple data collection methods and immediate sharing of results with all key stakeholders. In addition, in order to be most effective PME systems require active support from project and organizational management. If these factors are not present it might be best to reduce your expectations for PME or to devote scarce resources for PME to other projects.

Conditions Necessary for PME

Participatory M&E is much easier to establish in a project that is already using a participatory approach. To develop an effective PME system the following are usually necessary:

- Shared understanding among project partners of the project objectives and approach.
- An attitude of partnership characterized by mutual respect between the project staff and community.
- Commitment to use a participatory approach in all phases of M&E; patience and flexibility and willingness to allocate resources to the process.
- Participatory project management and decision-making to help ensure that the input from all participants into the M&E process will be taken seriously.

Source: WWF 1997

---

2. Begin with Stakeholder Analysis

Begin planning for participatory evaluations with a stakeholder analysis to understand the key evaluation stakeholders, their interests and specific information needs.

Evaluation Stakeholders	Interests in Evaluation	Specific Information Needs

The information gained through the analysis and ensuing discussions will help you to negotiate the focus of the evaluation. Since there are always an overwhelming number of issues/questions for evaluation, focusing evaluation questions is often the most challenging part of the process. One way to deal with this is to work with stakeholders to envision how they would use evaluation information if they had it and what decisions they would make. If a scenario for use can't be identified then it is probably not worthwhile spending time on that issue. A second way to focus is to tie evaluation questions to the project Goal, Purpose and Outputs. Even with these focusing efforts we work with stakeholders to prioritize evaluation questions through ranking and to select a

small set of practical performance indicators as the core of the PME system. At this stage we also track poverty data collection efforts that are already taking place in a local setting and we try to building on existing systems where possible rather than adding additional layers of data collection.

3. Become (or recruit) an Evaluation Facilitator

In PME evaluators play a facilitation role and assist stakeholders to participate in each stage of the evaluation process--from designing the evaluation system, to implementation and testing the system to training and capacity building to ensure that local people own and manage the system. In this approach, in stark contrast to the traditional role of the outside expert, evaluators play the role of facilitators, trainers and coaches. International agency staff may be members of the PME team and contribute valuable perspectives about the M&E requirements of HQ, but they need to work collaboratively with the evaluation facilitator and local stakeholders to negotiate the design of the PME system. The approach requires that staff from international agencies enter into a heavy listening and learning mode and that they become sensitive to working with local people and entering into local realities.

4. Use Variations of the Logical Framework Approach where Appropriate

Related to the above is the ability of facilitators to help stakeholders to select and use simple, participatory data collection tools and methods. With the results-orientation of the Logical Framework agencies have an evaluation tool that can be used in many different settings and combined with various less formal methods to make it more accessible to local groups. If stakeholder groups are illiterate, explicit use of the LogFrame is inappropriate since it puts groups at a disadvantage. When working with literate stakeholders the Logframe can be applied in large, mixed stakeholder groups using a wall-sized visually-oriented format to clarify project objectives, review project performance and agree on actions to improve it. Performance Improve Planning (PIP) is one such approach that we use for mid-term reviews.

5. Less Extractive, Less Formal Approaches are Better

In all PME work less extractive approaches to data collection and are better since they focus on generation of information for immediate decision-making and action by the groups who will take the action. In other words information is not removed from the communities or taken away by the experts. Rather it is generated and owned by the communities and with this there is greater commitment to action and greater local learning. In these situations a whole range of less formal methods are more appropriate---for example community meetings and group discussions, drama, story telling, before and after photos and drawings, community mapping, wealth rankings, etc. The attitudes and rich set of methods related to participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) are especially useful here.

6. Your Personal Attitudes Count

Finally, if you challenge yourself to become a evaluation facilitator you will need to develop attitudes of respect for local knowledge and learning. You will need to expand your personal repertoire of facilitation skills and skills in using simple, participatory evaluation tools and methods. And you will need to be willing to take some risks and make some mistakes along the way.

Start, Stumble, Self-Correct, Share

PME is one of a family of approaches for reversing centralization, standardization, and top-down development. PME enables and empowers the poor to do more of their own analysis, to take control of their lives and resources and to improve their well being as they define it.

The core of good PME is our own behavior and attitudes. It involves:

- being self-aware and self-critical
- embracing error
- handing over the stick
- sitting, listening and learning
- improvising, inventing and adapting
- using your own best judgement at all times

So we can ask who lectures, who holds the stick, whose finger wags? Whose knowledge, analysis and priorities   count? Ours? Theirs?, as we assume them to be? Or theirs and they freely express them? Good PME is empowering, not extractive. Good PME makes mistakes, learns from them and so is self-improving. Good PME spreads and improves on its own.

Source: Adapted from Robert Chambers on PRA and applied to PME, 1992

IV. Four Examples of PME

As you read these three examples, consider where each fits within Feurestein's typology for participatory evaluation in Section I above.

1. PM&E System for Local Development Project in Tanzania

United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has launched several initiatives to improve project quality and stakeholder participation in UNCDF's program cycle. One of these initiatives has focused on improving project evaluation and introducing participatory evaluation systems for selected UNCDF field projects. Social Impact conducted a two-day training for HQ staff to provide an overview of PME, and to map out a step-by-step approach for introducing PM&E systems to UNCDF projects. As part of the training UNCDF outlined next steps for pilot testing PM&E systems and introducing operational guidelines for integrating PME into its project cycle.

In Tanzania SI is working with UNCDF to design and implement a PM&E system for a local development fund project in Mwanza District. The SI facilitator met with a range of evaluation stakeholders at the village level up through district authorities to determine their information needs regarding the project and to assess monitoring and evaluation activities already in place at the local level. Roughly 35 reports were being generated by the District for central authorities with a good deal of redundancy. In a two day workshop the facilitator worked with local stakeholders to identify and prioritize practical indicators for the project. A local artist was contracted to animate how to use PRA methods, many of which were already in use at the district level, to support the project PM&E system. A simple operational guide was developed, training is being conducted for the PM&E team and a medium-term plan for the roll out of the PM&E system is being finalized. The project management team, local and District authorities and UNCDF HQ are all supportive of the effort at this stage.

Source: Social Impact

---

2. Performance Improvement Planning in Sri Lanka

The British foreign aid program (DFID) recently conducted a mid-term review of its Relief Project for persons displaced by Sri Lanka's civil war. The approach that was used was called Performance Improvement Planning (PIP)--a participatory review method based on the Logical Framework Approach. A four-day workshop was held to help 30 participants from local and international NGOs and DFID in assessing the project and developing action plans to improve its performance.

Using a wall-sized visual depiction of the LogFrame, workshop participants first analyzed each of the project's main elements: Goal, Purpose, Outputs and Assumptions. Second, they clarified project objectives and measurable indicators. Some objectives and indicators were no longer relevant and were removed from the project design. Third, in group discussions participants identified "performance gaps" that were preventing the project from reaching planned levels of performance. Fourth, they developed strategies for improving project performance. Fifth, they developed action plans, with clear roles and responsibilities, to support each of the strategies.

The PIP process succeeded in refocusing project objectives, building partnerships among the implementing agencies, and leading partners to implement action plans to get the project back on track. The PIP techniques were adopted by the NGOs and, within a few months, PIP was adapted into local languages and applied in the local communities. Communities used the process to improve grassroots level project and non-project activities.

Source: Social Impact

3. Participatory Evaluation in Rose Place, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

A community sanitation project in Rose Place, St. Vincent and the Grenadines used photography and simple written commentary from community members to monitor and evaluate project progress. Throughout the project photos have been taken at different stages. A cheap scrap book has been made into a photo album to tell the story of the project so far in chronological order. Photos have been stuck in by community members. Children and adults have written their comments to explain what is happening in Rose Place.

In many cases there are photos which can be compared--before and after photos. Some photos show the problem. Others show the solution. The visual difference has a strong impact and generates a lot of comments.

Newspaper articles, radio announcement (which community members helped write), as well as their goals and feedback have also gone into the book, giving a very good overview of everything that has been taking place. It is something that has generated a lot of interest because it is attractive, tangible and very immediate and accessible--and its the community's!

Source: DFID, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines, Dissemination Note No.1, SDD 1997

4.   Participatory Planning and M&E Systems for World Bank Supported Projects in Water Supply and   Sanitation: Nepal and India

Over the past six years, IDA/IBRD has worked with HMG Nepal and the State Government of Uttar Pradesh, India to develop a new generation of community-based water supply and sanitation programmes that rely heavily on the use of participatory methods for planning and M&E.

In the context of a pilot project in Nepal and a current National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (NRWSSP) begun in l993, IDA tested methods and approaches for large-scale participatory programmes. While subproject water and sanitation schemes were designed and implemented by communities in a participatory manner, it was also decided that as "project managers" communities would also have to carryout their own situational analysis, planning, execution, O&M, and monitoring and evaluation. SARAR methods along with PRA methods were used systematically and to develop community planning and monitoring systems. These were combined with conventional M&E , and the system comprised performance, process, impact and strategic, or policy reform monitoring.

As part of community planning and monitoring, a set of 24 participatory tools were specifically developed and adapted to the needs of users in Nepal. These were tested over time, first in the pilot with about 24 NGOs in 113 communities spread across 12 Districts. One M&E technique was the PRA tool, Healthy Homes. This proved highly effective in village levels, where women gained status as they took charge of choosing indicators and monitoring personal hygiene, and domestic and environmental hygiene and sanitation practices in the households and public areas of their communities. This also enabled them to participate more actively in water and sanitation committees. The approach has now expanded in over 220 additional communities through several cycles and should reach 900 communities by the end of the NRWSSP.

In Uttar Pradesh India, the approach was replicated and adapted to the specific needs of the Uttar Pradesh Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation Project. (UP-RWS-ES Project) This Project has been notably successful in systematic application of SARAR and PRA methods by NGOs in Project field areas. Participatory planning and M&E tools have been utilized as the Project expands its work in the UP Hills and Bundelkhand areas, attempting to reach 1000 communities with RWS-ES Services. Of particular note has been the use of public spaces to document the results of the participatory tools. Maps and project information are publicly displayed in a graphic manner on schools and clinics. The methods were found to be powerful animators of local will to design, build and monitor these community facilities. The initial success of the Project has led national authorities in India to call for replication of the approach in other states.

The two projects, and attempts to adapt the approach to Bangladesh, have demonstrated that participatory M&E can be part of large scale programmes and function effectively if supported and nurtured. There is a learning curve to develop capacities of support organizations such as the NGOs involved and to adapt the specific tools and methods needed for each project. But the effort has proven promising.

Source: Jacob Pfohl, Consultant

CONCLUSION

PME is a broad constellation of approaches, methods and techniques that development agencies can use to strengthen their poverty alleviation programs, ensure accountability, build local management capacity and foster an environment of partnership and collaborative learning. The best place to start with PME is to design PME systems into new projects. PME works best in an environment of participatory management and shared decision-making. Leadership attitudes of respect for local knowledge and partnership with local agencies are vital to the success of PME. Not all projects are ready

or appropriate for PME. Rather, PME activities should be chosen carefully and then sponsoring agencies should fully commit the time, resources and leadership needed to ensure that PME activities succeed.

Checklist for Designing a PME System

1. Will it be sustainable once the project has ended?
2. Do the people responsible for PME have all the necessary skills?
3. Can the system be incorporated into the structure of collaborating agencies?
4. Is the system based on a clear understanding of project objectives?
5. Is it based on a clear understanding of the information needs of key stakeholders?
6. Is the system based on indicators defined by program participants?
7. Does the system involve the participation of all key stakeholders in every stage of the PME cycle—planning, data collection, analysis and use?
8. Do data collection tools fit the skills of the collectors?
9. Is it cost-effective?
10. Is the amount of data collection manageable and conducive to timely analysis and use of the results?
11. Is the system documented so everyone knows what it contains?
12. Is there a plan for testing and adjusting the system?
13. Have annual self-assessments been planned?
14. Have impact evaluations been scheduled?
15. Others?

Source: adapted from WWF (1997).

Some Useful Resources

Aaker, J. 1994. *Looking Back and Looking Forward: A Participatory Approach to Evaluation*.
        New York: PACT.
Aubel, J. 1993. *Participatory Program Evaluation: A Manual for Involving Stakeholders in the   Evaluation Process*. New York: PACT.
Cameron, E. and Page, K. 1998. *Facilitation Made Easy: Practical Tips to Improve Facilitation in Workshops*, New York: PACT
Casely, D. and Kumar, K. 1987. *Project Monitoring and Evaluation in Agriculture*.
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
Chambers, R. 1994. "Participatory Rural Appraisal: Analysis of Experience." *World   Development*
Chambers, R. 1994. "Note for the Staff of Bilateral and Multilateral Aid Agencies and of Northern NGOs
Cousins, J. and Whitmore, E .1999. "Framing Participatory Evaluation" *New Directions   in Program Evaluation* No 80 (Winter) 1998 Jossey-Bass
Feuerstein, M. 1986. *Partners in Evaluation: Evaluating Development and Community   Programmes wi*
Forster, R. ed. 1996. *ZOPP Marries PRA?* Eschborn: GTZ
Gosling, L. (ed). 1995. *Toolkits: A Practical Guide to Assessment, Monitoring, Review and   Evaluation.* London: Save the Children.

Goyder, H. and Davies, R. 1998. *Participatory Impact Assessment*. Somerset, U.K:ActionAid

Harding, P. 1991. "Qualitative Indicators and the Project Framework." *Community   Development Jo

IDS. Internet PRA Subject Page: http://www.ids.ac.uk/eldis/pra/pra.html. Brighton: Institute for   Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Isham, J and Narayan, D. 1994. "Does Participation Improve Project Performance?"   Washington, D.C

Kaner, S. 1996. *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* British Columbia:
        New Society Publishers

Kumar, K. 1987. *Rapid, Low-cost Data Collection Methods for USAID: Program Design and   Methodology Report No. 10*. Washington, D.C.: USAID/CDIE.

Larson, P and Svendsen, D. 1997. *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Practical Guide to Successful Integrated Conservation and Development Projects.* Washington D.C.:   World Wild Life Fund

Marsden, D and Oakley, P (eds). 1990. *Evaluating Social Development Projects: Development   Guidelines #5.* Oxford: Oxfam.

Mayo-Smith, I. 1987. *Achieving Improved Performance in Public Institutions*. West Hartford: Kumerian.

Narayan, D. *Participatory Evaluation:Tools for Managing Change in Water and Sanitation*.   Technical Paper Number 207. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Naraya, D. and Srinivasan, L. 1994. *Participatory Development Tool Kit* Washington,
        DC: The World Bank

NORAD, 1989. *The Logical Framework Approach: Handbook for Objectives-oriented Project   Planning*. Oslo: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

PACT, 1998. *Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting*. New York, PACT

Patton, M.Q. 1997. *Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

 Patton, M.Q. "Toward Distinguishing Empowerment Evaluation and Placing It in a Larger Context"
        Evaluation Practice 1997 18(2)

Pfohl, J. 1986. *Participatory Evaluation: A User's Guide*. New York, PACT

Pretty, J. et al. 1996. *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer's Guide.* London:
        International Institute for Environment and Development.

Rugh, J. *Self-Evaluation: Ideas for Participatory Evaluation of Community Development Projects*
        World Neighbors

Sartorius, R. 1991.   "The Logical Framework Approach to Project Design and Management."   *Evaluation Practice* 12(2), 139-47.

----- . 1996. "The Third Generation Logical Framework." *European Journal of Agricultural   Extension.* March.

For additional information please contact:

em: info@socialimpact.com
www.socialimpact.com