

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: An Overview of Guiding Pedagogical Principles and Implications on Development

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Abstract: Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is a process of self-assessment, collective knowledge generation, and cooperative action in which stakeholders in a program or intervention substantively and collaboratively identify the monitoring and evaluation issues, collect and analyse data, and take-action as a result of what they learn through this process. In the development context, PM&E strengthens and deepens contribution of primary stakeholders by honouring their perspectives, voices, preferences and decisions. Five key pedagogical principles underpin PM&E including participation (involvement in and influence in decision making), negotiation (working through different views), learning (gaining knowledge from initiatives), flexibility (modification of strategies to achieve desired change) and methodologically eclectic (utilization of wide variety of methods). PM&E focuses on *monitoring* (tracking and feedback), on *evaluation* (valuing and performance review) as well as *strengthening and deepening participation* (shared learning, joint decision making, mutual respect, co-ownership, democratisation and empowerment). This article provides an overview of PM&E, five pedagogical principles underpinning PM&E, and some gains that come with the application of the principles in development.

Keywords: Monitoring, Evaluation, Stakeholder, Development, Participation, Learning, Approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) stems from an acknowledgement of the limitations of conventional M&E (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998) and specifically the need to strengthen and deepen contribution of primary stakeholders (those who are directly affected by the intervention being examined) as active participants in interventions by them taking the lead in tracking and analysing progress towards jointly agreed results and deciding on corrective action (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). According to Jackson and Kassam (1998), PM&E is “a process of self-assessment, collective knowledge generation, and cooperative action in which stakeholders in a program or intervention substantively and collaboratively identify the evaluation issues, collect and analyse data, and take-action as a result of what they learn through this process.” This definition surpasses involving primary stakeholders in a process of ‘conventional’ M&E (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006), to encompass a wider range of stakeholders at every stage of the process (Estrella, et al., 2000). However, despite growing interest in this subject, Estrella (2000), notes that there is no single definition or methodology of PM&E and ascribes this to the diverse range of experiences in this field. Recent years, as noted by Hilhorst and Guijt (2006), have seen a diversifying of contexts in which the ideas of PM&E have been applied and, therefore, allowing for methodological innovation in the approach.

Philosophically, participatory monitoring and evaluation seeks to honour the perspectives, voices, preferences and decisions of the least powerful and most affected stakeholders the local beneficiaries in a bid to ensure that evaluation is *done with* these key groups rather than *done to* them (Rossman, 2015). As observed by Guijt and Gaventa (1998), primary stakeholders’ (intended beneficiaries) roles in PM&E approach includes designing and adapting the methodology,

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analysing data, sharing findings and linking them to action as opposed to conventional M&E where primary stakeholder only provide information. Participatory monitoring and evaluation is fundamentally about sharing knowledge among beneficiaries of the program, program implementers, funders, and often outside evaluation practitioners (Rossman, 2015).

A key part of understanding PM&E depends on how 'participation' is interpreted (Guijt, Arevalo, & Saladores, 1998). Participation may be defined as "the practice of consulting and involving relevant stakeholders in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development" (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). Guijt and Gaventa (1998) further posits that participation means opening up the design of the process to include those most directly affected, and agreeing to analyse data together (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998). In as much as this definition hold sway, Estrella and Gaventa (1997) note that there is still ambiguity in translating the concept and objectives of participation into practice. Monitoring and evaluation on the other hand is about assessing actual change against stated objectives, and making a judgement whether development efforts and investments were worthwhile or 'cost-effective' (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006).

Operationally, PM&E as observed by Jackson and Kassam (1998), is closely related to participatory research (relies on committed outsiders to promote the community's rights and control the knowledge creation process) and participatory action research (seeks to enable marginalized groups in society to construct countervailing power to that of their oppressors through acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge). It builds upon the insights, approaches and tools used in participatory (action) research, but also borrows from "traditional" social sciences approaches and "conventional" monitoring and evaluation theory and practice (Vernooy, 1999). Throughout the process, the goal of PM&E is to try to achieve a balance of power and voice among the various participant groups (Rossman, 2015) and as the development work matures and responds to changing needs and circumstances, so too does the process of PM&E shift and adapt (Estrella, et al., 2000).

II. BACKGROUND

Documented experiences of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) surfaced as early as the 1970s (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997) and draws from over 40 years of participatory research tradition, including participatory action research (PAR), participatory learning and action (including Participatory Rural Appraisal or PRA), and farming systems research (FSR) or farming participatory research (FPR) (Estrella, et al., 2000). As PM&E began to be used more widely in the 1980s, especially within the policy making domain, Estrella (2000), observed that practitioners conceived PM&E narrowly as a technical application of a "toolbox" of methods to the detriment of individual and community empowerment (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). According to Jackson & Kassam (1998), 1990s saw the reconceptualization of PM&E especially with emphasis from larger donor agencies to include other stakeholders involved in the development interventions based on a call for greater recognition and precision in analysing participation.

As observed by Hilhorst and Guijt (2006), PM&E focuses on *monitoring* (tracking and feedback), on *evaluation* (valuing and performance review) as well as *strengthening and deepening participation* (shared learning, joint decision making, mutual respect, co-ownership, democratisation and empowerment). As an evolving field, Estrella (2000) notes that PM&E has increasingly been applied in different contexts and in hundreds of development initiatives around the world, and thus gained multiple functions as people learn how to adapt, innovate, and experiment with participatory approaches. The PM&E process is thus build around agreeing on expected results and milestones, defining how to track progress, collecting required data, undertaking joint analysis and decide on actions (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998). Drawing from CONCERN's (1996) overview (as cited in Estrella and Gaventa (1997), the four major steps of applying PM&E in practice are: 1) Planning or establishing the framework for a PM&E process; 2) Gathering data; 3) Data analysis; and 4) documentation, reporting and sharing of information.

III. PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY M&E AND THEIR ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

3.1 FIVE GUIDING PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

3.1.1 Participation:

In Waglé and Shah's notes (as cited in Hilhorst and Guijt, 2006), participation is defined as the process through which stakeholders are involved in and influence decision-making, resource allocation, implementation and control of development initiatives. The principle of participation emphasizes the creation of structures and processes that include

those most directly affected by the program and often those most frequently powerless and/or voiceless in program design and implementation (Rossman, 2015). Particular interest has been growing in PM&E to counter more traditional ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom-up’ approaches to evaluation. The emphasis here is on deepening participation, a process that is intrinsically linked to learning and empowerment by involving local people, development agencies, and policy makers in deciding together how progress should be measured, and results acted upon (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998).

As Guijt and Gaventa (1998) maintained, PM&E offers new ways of assessing and learning from change that are more inclusive, and more in tune with the views and aspirations of those most directly affected. Contention however stems not only from the difficulty in identifying who participates, but also in determining what roles different stakeholders can and should play at which stages of the process (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). There is still great ambiguity in translating the concept and objectives of participation into practice (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). It is fundamental to note that for participation to be effective, considerations must be made regarding the degree of participation required from stakeholders (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). In a bid to characterize participation in monitoring and evaluation, Estrella and Gaventa (1997) propose two main ways: by *whom* (externally led, internally led, or jointly -led) M&E is initiated and conducted, and to *whose perspectives* (all major stakeholders, beneficiaries, or marginalized groups) are particularly emphasised.

Adequate capacities for monitoring and evaluation should be in place on deciding on setting up a PM&E process in a multi-stakeholder setting (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). As observed by UNDP (2009), PM&E capacity generally occurs across four domains: institutional arrangements, including adequate resources and incentives; leadership; knowledge; and accountability mechanisms. Capacities at these levels are interdependent and influence each other through complex co-dependent relationships. An analysis needs to be made of the willingness and ability of all key stakeholders to participate and to respond to PM&E outcomes (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). Facilitators of PM&E in a setting of multi-stakeholder dialogue need to be politically astute, skilled and dedicated, and demonstrate perseverance and enthusiasm (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). Another challenge to effective participation at both institutional and community level is perceptions which often hinder more active participation and the fuller appreciation of community knowledge and recognition of priorities (Jackson & Kassam, 1998).

3.1.2 Negotiation:

Negotiation is a principle of PM&E that involves conveying roles, responsibilities, values and parameters that define the nature of partnership (STEPS Project, 2015). Usually there are multiple stakeholders involved in local development, which may include project staff, customary authorities, formal and informal community-based organizations and groups, NGOs, local government agencies, private and public service providers, politicians, entrepreneurs, etc. (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). Estrella and Gaventa (1997) point out that: ‘addressing the issue of power in PM&E implies recognising unequal social relationships and positions – whether between different actors or at different institutional levels that underlie the PM&E process itself. Hilhorst & Guijt (2006) further posit that ‘the relation between office or duty bearers and right holders may shape these stakeholder interactions; the challenge is to arrive at a dialogue on expectations, roles and responsibilities.’ Negotiation is a commitment to working through different views (with the potential for conflict and disagreement) about what monitoring and evaluation should focus on, how it should be conducted and used, and what actions should result (Rossman, 2015). Estrella and Gaventa (1997) elaborate that the value of negotiation is in learning about people’s concerns and enabling primary stakeholder-the beneficiaries-to speak for themselves.

According to Hilhorst and Guijt (2006), PM&E requires negotiation to reach agreement about who will participate, what will be monitored or evaluated, how and when data will be collected and analysed, what the information means, and how findings will be shared, and what action will be taken. As opposed to conventional M&E where senior managers, or outside experts plan and manage this process, PM&E in this case empowers local people, project staff and other stakeholders, often by the assistance of a facilitator to plan and manage the process (Guijt & Gaventa, Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, 1998). In spite of the general recognition of PM&E as a social process of negotiation, Estrella and Gaventa (1997) note that ‘there is need for a more explicit and open discussion about the complex social dynamics and power relationships that underlie and constitute the actual practice of PM&E.’ Throughout the process, the goal of PM&E is to try to achieve a balance of power and voice among the various participant groups (Rossman, 2015) as well as ensuring that stakeholders articulate and present their needs, interests, and expectations (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997).

3.1.3 Learning:

Participatory processes lead to learning among all participants which, when shared, leads to corrective action and subsequent program improvement (Rossman, 2015; Guijt & Gaventa, 1998). The lessons learned from PM&E comprise the new knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (initiative, context outcomes and even evaluation methods) that is applicable to and useful in other similar contexts (UNDP, 2009). According to Hilhorst & Guijt (2006), a learning-focused M&E system builds on what people already know and do, using and developing their existing abilities and skills to monitor their progress. In this approach, participants learn together from experience and gain the abilities to evaluate their own needs, analyse their own priorities and objectives, and undertake action-oriented planning (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997).

Learning does not happen in one sitting (UNDP, 2009) but is rather part of an ongoing process (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). Learning is a cyclical process in which communities and CSOs reflect continuously on the effects of their actions and where the process is leading them (UNDP, 2009). It evolves, starting with individuals raising important issues and questioning assumptions through group-based analyses that bring out different perspectives and information inputs (European Commission Civil Society Fund in Ethiopia, 2017). Through regular exchange of information, reporting, knowledge products, learning sessions and the evaluation management response system, information from monitoring and evaluation can be fed back into the learning process and planning (UNDP, 2009). It is this learning process that creates conducive conditions for change and action. Learning also offers an evidence base for selecting and designing development interventions that are likely to be effective in fostering outcomes of interest (White & Raitzer, 2017). Hamel and Prahalad, (as cited in Estrella and Gaventa, 1997) describe identify four levels of learning: *Level 1* - Learning facts, knowledge, processes and procedures; *Level 2* - Learning new job skills that are transferable to other situations; *Level 3* - Learning to adapt and to derive lessons from success and failure; *Level 4* - Learning to be innovative and creative (designing the future rather than merely adapting to it).

3.1.4 Flexibility:

Flexibility is crucial for PM&E given changing circumstances, people, and skills available for the process (see Rossman, 2015; Guijt & Gaventa, 1998). As circumstances change, those involved in and affected by the evaluation should be committed to modifying their strategies to achieve desired results knowledge that will shape effective and sustainable programs (Rossman, 2015). According to Elkins (2006) "Shifting situations require flexible systems, and flexible but effective M&E systems require ownership that is broad, information is transparent, and feedback is rapid, targeted, and solution-oriented." Flexibility is required on issues associated with developing indicators, establishing new standards of 'rigour', as well as combining different approaches and methods (Estrella, et al., 2000). This argument is further supported by Hilhorst and Guijt (2006) who point out that flexibility is essential during implementation of interventions, since the number, role, and skills of stakeholders, and contextual conditions change over time.

Elkins (2006) notes some typical situations that require M&E flexibility under unstable or insecure conditions: when data is less reliable, lowering confidence in measured values; during changing context thus raising uncertainty in interpretation of measured values; shifts in activity targets necessitated by renegotiation with donors and other stakeholders; during instances of security constraints; when new information is needed more urgently, raising costs of M&E implementation; when 'goalposts' or whole game changes, invalidating baselines and/or requiring comprehensive overhaul of M&E strategy and when stakes are higher, rewards are more fleeting, and systematic M&E less feasible. According to (Elkins, 2006), the critical role M&E systems can and should play in providing time-sensitive feedback based on quality data to helpfully constrain uncertain decision-making.

3.1.5 Methodologically eclectic:

PM&E is typically methodologically eclectic and therefore practitioners can draw on a wide variety of methods to generate information (Rossman, 2015). Different techniques meet specific purpose, from measurement and description of events and states to understanding of a situation or a process, bringing their own strengths and limitations (Stern, et al., 2012). In Arrnonia and Campilan studies (as cited in Estrella & Gaventa, 1997), there exists a great diversity in concepts, methods and applications adopted in PM&E. Given that participatory approaches rests heavily on ideas – such as participation, ownership, empowerment, transparency and democratic accountability (Stern, et al., 2012), beneficiary and

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stakeholder perspectives should be incorporated when determining methodological approaches. Beneficiaries can invent some and use local processes that are relevant and heuristic (Rossman, 2015) in order to counter more traditional 'top-down' approaches to M&E (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997).

According to Estrella and Gaventa (1997), participatory evaluation approach is more open to accept trade-offs between scientific rigour and locally meaningful participation as compared to the traditional approach. This has however been criticised for lack of rigour and accuracy, for being subjective and for bias in favour of specific local groups or individuals (Guijt, Arevalo, & Saladores, 1998). PM&E offers a flexible framework with which to consider a variety of methods for use in evaluation (King & Appleton, 1999).

IV. PARTICIPATORY M&E AND IMPLICATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT

Participatory monitoring and evaluation has been used in hundreds of projects in differing contexts and programmes across the world (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). Just like development, participatory M&E is a social, cultural and political process that brings people together in ways (Guijt, Arevalo, & Saladores, 1998) that result into certain advantages. By involving stakeholders in decision-making, resource allocation, implementation and control of development initiatives (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006), PM&E allows for those directly affected to draw both successes and failures (Rossman, 2015) since it puts them in charge (Guijt & Gaventa, Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, 1998).

PM&E approach yields empowerment among stakeholders by enhancing stakeholders' capacity, self-reliance, confidence (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006) and shows that their views count (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998) as they take action and promote change (Estrella, et al., 2000). This is achieved through addressing issues in such a way that the constituencies are moved to act on what they know (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (as cited in King & Appleton, 1999) note that one of the aims of responsive evaluation is to protect against exploitation while empowering and enfranchising less powerful. PM&E offers a more equitable voice for all stakeholders during the monitoring and evaluative process by ensuring equitable participation in the process. This process yields more accurate and more socially just and equitable development strategies (Jackson & Kassam, 1998).

Supporting operational and strategic management by providing basic management information needs to direct, coordinate and control resources towards the achievement of set goals, objectives and strategies (Hilhorst & Guijt, 2006). Various stakeholders hold different views and knowledge levels and therefore it is highly likely that groups who have held more powerful positions in the past will expect to have a greater say in the monitoring and evaluation proceedings and influence over the study outcomes (King & Appleton, 1999).

Besides fulfilling the conventional functions of monitoring and evaluation for projects, more innovative use of PM&E includes managing and resolving conflicts (Guijt, Arevalo, & Saladores, 1998). While working together through a PM&E learning cycle, mutual understanding is enhanced, creating the basis for dialogue and constructive working relationships (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). Guijt, Arevalo and Saladores, (1998) further postulate that as more and different stakeholder groups co-operate to keep track of change together, they will need to make compromises as they strive for social transformation.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has explored PM&E, its principles and the potential for this approach to yield inclusive development. It is important to reiterate that divorcing PM&E methodology from its philosophical underpinnings is counterproductive. Each of the five pedagogical principles outlined in this article which include participation (involvement in and influence in decision making), negotiation (working through different views), learning (gaining knowledge from initiatives), flexibility (modification of strategies to achieve desired change) and methodologically eclectic (utilization of wide variety of methods) are interdependent and often overlap to reinforce broad-based participation in development. Theoretically, participatory monitoring and evaluation seeks to honour the perspectives, voices, preferences and decisions of the least powerful and most affected stakeholders the local beneficiaries in a bid to ensure that evaluation is *done with* these key groups rather than *done to* them. The setting up of PM&E framework therefore requires adequate institutional, leadership, knowledge and accountability capacities. A key distinguishing characteristic of PM&E is the way different actors or stakeholders at various levels interact to assess and reflect on project results. Meaningful and greater participation allows actors to influence decision-making, resource allocation, implementation and control of development initiatives. PM&E is intrinsically linked to learning and empowerment by involving local people, development agencies, and policy makers in

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deciding together how progress should be measured, and results acted upon. As contexts change, so does the process of participatory monitoring and evaluation. PM&E builds on what people already know and do, using and developing their existing abilities and skills to monitor their progress while balancing actor's interests in pursuit of achieving a balance of power and voice among the various participant groups. PM&E rests heavily on ideas – such as participation, ownership, empowerment, transparency and democratic accountability - and builds around agreeing on expected results and milestones, defining how to track progress, collecting required data, undertaking joint analysis and decide on actions.

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