

# LEARNING FROM CHANGE<sup>1</sup>

## Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation

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Published by Intermediate Technology Publications.  
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### **An Introduction**

#### **Marisol Estrella**

This book is a collection of experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) from around the world. It allows different ‘voices’ to tell their story from their different perspectives, contexts, and settings. The purpose of the book is *not* to establish a singular definition of PM&E practice, but to pull together these experiences, review these efforts, and see what key issues and questions emerge.

This book focuses, above all, on the *process* of doing PM&E. Emphasis is placed not only on *what* is being monitored and evaluated, but more on *who* is measuring and *how* different concerns and interests are negotiated and represented. This process is shaped primarily by stakeholders- the individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions- who directly and indirectly influence but also are affected by the actions or development interventions of others. Stakeholders include beneficiaries, project or programme staff and management, researchers, local and central government politicians and technical staff, funding agencies, among others. The inclusion of many representatives of stakeholder groups is the ‘axis’ around which the PM&E process revolves, as people together analyse existing realities and seek points of action.

In many respects, *Learning from change* is about the different lenses through which diverse groups and people are able to view, describe and act on changes. It is about

changing the way we learn about the results and impacts of our development efforts. It recognises the importance of people's participation in analysing and interpreting changes, and learning from their own development experience. This process of learning becomes ever more complex, as more stakeholders within all kinds of institutions become involved in monitoring and evaluation.

The book is a collection of twelve case studies that describe how different stakeholders have applied PM&E approaches across a range of purposes and contexts. The case studies have been selected from papers originally submitted at the Philippines Workshop, and together they represent inspiring examples from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers, community based organisations (CBOs) or people's organisations (POs), community leaders, government agencies, and funding agencies. While these case studies indicate the range of diversity in PM&E practice, they reflect experiences mainly in the field of development. They cut across different sectors, including agriculture, forestry, natural resource management, community development, organisational development and local governance. Many take place within the context of a development project or programme intervention, generally at the local or community-level. All case studies except one (Rutherford) are from the South.

There are of course many other varied applications of PM&E in a number of other fields, sectors and areas of the world, which are not represented in this book. For instance, some development and academic institutions (e.g. NGOs, funders) are adopting organisational learning approaches, whereas private businesses are adopting and leading in the development of learning-oriented approaches for greater social and ethical accountability (Boyett and Boyett 1998; Edwards and Hulme 1996; Zadek et al 1997). PM&E is also applied in many communities of the North (MacGillivray et al, 1998; Parachini and Mott 1997; Whitmore 1998; Sustainable Development Indicators 1999). There may be further experiences in other sectors, about which we know little, namely: health; education; urban settings; areas of conflict, emergencies and disasters; with women and marginalised groups (children, elderly, persons with disabilities), among others. Work is proceeding in these areas but did not form the focus of the discussions and case studies available for this book.

The book organises the case studies into three thematic sections, although a number of cases cut across these themes. Part 1 describes experiences that innovate with various methods and approaches to PM&E. Part 2 focuses on community-driven monitoring and evaluation experiences. Part 3 looks at the implications of 'scaling up' PM&E in terms of changing institutions and building more learning-oriented organisations. The concluding sections examine lessons and insights drawn from these case studies and other experiences and pose challenges for the further development of PM&E practice.

This chapter provides a historical background to PM&E, and outlines some of the key concepts and differences between participatory and conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation. It attempts to clarify common terms and definitions of PM&E and describes how PM&E can be applied in a number of contexts and purposes. The purpose of the chapter is to raise issues and questions emerging in the field.

### **Tracing the history of PM&E**

The concept of participatory monitoring and evaluation itself is not new. PM&E draws from 20 years of participatory research traditions, 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). Some of these initial efforts to experiment with participatory approaches were supported by NGOs such as World Neighbours, Oxfam, Users' Perspectives With Agricultural Research and Development (UPWARD), the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) (see Armonia and Campilan 1997; Bunch 1985; Campos and Coupal 1996; Howes 1992; PRIA 1981; Rugh 1992).

By the 1980s, concepts of participatory monitoring and evaluation had already entered the policy making domain of larger donor agencies and development organisations, most notably the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), and the UK Department for International Development (DFID)<sup>2</sup>, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) and the World Bank (Howes 1992; Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger 1996). Outside the field of development, PM&E can also trace its beginnings in the private sector where there has been growing appreciation for individual and organisational learning (Raynard 1998; Zadek et al 1997).

While interest in constructing PM&E processes is growing, it must be noted that there are still many local forms of PM&E that go unrecognised, as they are often regarded as common-place practice and part of daily activity. Communities and community-based organisations have long been monitoring and evaluating their work (without labelling it as such), developing their own procedures for recording and analysing information, and using that information for making decisions. In one case study, researchers noticed that farmers in Bolivia and Laos already conduct and monitor on-farm experiments through direct observations and verbal sharing of information with other farmers (Lawrence et al). Many of these local initiatives are carried out informally, and they provide rich potential for developing innovative approaches to monitor and evaluate change.

The interest in PM&E is affected by several factors, including: (i) the trend in management circles towards 'performance based accountability', with greater emphasis placed on achieving results and objectives beyond the financial reporting; (ii) the growing scarcity of funds, leading to a demand for greater accountability and demonstrated impact or success; (iii) the shift towards decentralisation and devolution of central government responsibilities and authority to lower levels of government, necessitating new forms of oversight to ensure transparency and to improve support to constituency-responsive initiatives; and (iv) stronger capacities and experiences of NGOs and CBOs as decision makers and implementers in the development process (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Estrella and Gaventa 1998; Guijt and Gaventa 1998).

### **Integrating Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation**

Interest in PM&E is also partly a reflection of the international development community's dissatisfaction with conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation, particularly in the last decade. Arguments against the commonly practised top-down approaches to monitoring and evaluation are discussed widely in the literature (see Feuerstein 1986; Greene 1994; Guba and Lincoln 1989; PRIA 1995, 1981; Rubin 1995; UPWARD 1997; Whitmore 1999).

While there are many variations, conventional monitoring and evaluation has been characterised as oriented solely to the needs of funding agencies and policymakers. Many argue that conventional approaches attempt to produce information that is 'objective', 'value-free' and 'quantifiable'; hence, outsiders are usually contracted to carry out the evaluation for the sake of maintaining 'objectivity'.. Stakeholders directly involved in or affected by the very development activities meant to benefit from them have little or no input in the evaluation, either in determining questions asked and types of information obtained, or in defining measures of 'success' (Rubin 1995: 20).

In response to these problems and criticisms of conventional M&E, new ways of monitoring and evaluating development interventions have evolved. These innovative approaches aim to make monitoring and evaluation more participatory and effective by including a wider range of stakeholders at every stage of the process. Although there are many variations of PM&E, there are at least four common features which contribute to good PM&E practice: 1) participation, 2) learning, 3) negotiation, and 4) flexibility (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). Emphasis is shifted 'away from externally controlled data-seeking evaluations towards recognition of locally-relevant or stakeholder-based processes for gathering, analysing, and using information' (Abbot and Guijt 1998). Furthermore, participatory monitoring and evaluation can serve as a tool for self-assessment. It strives to be an internal learning process which enables people to reflect on past experience, examine present realities, revisit objectives, and define future strategies, by recognising different needs of stakeholders and negotiating their diverse claims and interests. The PM&E process is flexible and adaptive to local contexts and constantly changing circumstances and concerns of stakeholders. By encouraging stakeholder participation beyond data gathering, PM&E is about promoting self-reliance in decision making and problem solving, therefore strengthening people's capacities to take action and promote change.

In practice, the differences between conventional and participatory monitoring and evaluation are not so clearly dichotomised. There is a wide continuum across participatory and conventional M&E approaches. Participatory evaluations may engage outside experts, but in different roles and relationships to facilitate the inclusion of a wider number of stakeholders, on the premise that this will result in a number of ideas and perspectives. For instance, outside facilitators may play a critical role in helping to establish and design a PM&E system, in the actual facilitation of the process, and in analysing and learning from findings (Blauert and Quintanar; Espinosa; Hamilton et al; Lawrence et al). In some PM&E experiences, the project used pre-determined indicators for measuring 'success' (Gobisaikhan and Menamkart), while others encouraged various

stakeholders to measure change according to their own criteria and indicators<sup>3</sup> (Abes; Blauert and Quintanar; Rutherford; Sidersky and Guijt; Torres). During the Philippines Workshop, participants pointed out that both participatory and conventional approaches can and do employ qualitative and quantitative methods for data gathering and analysis; hence, the distinction between more or less participatory M&E does not lie in methods alone (IIRR, 1998).

### ***Defining participatory monitoring and evaluation***

Despite growing interest in the subject, there is no single definition or methodology of PM&E (see Box 1). The difficulty of establishing a common definition for PM&E highlights the diverse range of experiences in this field, but also underscores the difficulty of clarifying concepts of ‘monitoring’, ‘evaluation’ and ‘participation’. For example, the case studies featured in this collection do not make clear distinctions between monitoring and evaluation, and many of them use these terms interchangeably.

#### **Box 1.**

##### **Terms used to describe PM&E practice**

- Participatory Evaluation (PE)
- Participatory Monitoring (PM)
- Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation (PAME)
- Participatory Impact Monitoring (PIM)
- Process Monitoring (PM)
- Self-evaluation (SE) or Auto-evaluation
- Stakeholder-based evaluation / Stakeholder Assessment
- Empowerment Evaluation (EE)
- Community Monitoring / Citizen Monitoring (CM)
- Self Monitoring and Evaluation (SM&E) and
- Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PPM&E)
- Transformative Participatory Evaluation (T-PE)

The problem with clarifying definitions of PM&E stems partly from the discourse which surrounds the use of these terms. In the field of international development, monitoring and evaluation are terms that implicitly suggest particular meanings. Evaluations have been used by funding agencies primarily as a tool to control and manage the disbursement of resources to recipient organisations or beneficiaries. As argued by Carden (this volume): “This approach to evaluation remains an important dimension of accountability for any donor agency...From the point of view of recipient organisations, evaluation has thus been viewed largely as a policing mechanism.”

The terms ‘monitoring’ and ‘evaluation’ can also take on different meanings when used and interpreted in the local language and context, which can make introducing PM&E problematic (see Gobisaikhan and Menamkart; Symes and Jasser). At the Philippines Workshop, participants did not attempt to reach a single definition for PM&E (Table 1). Defining ‘participation’ in the Workshop proved to be problematic, as there were no set rules to determine *who* should be involved, and the *degree* and *quality* of participation

throughout the process, a major issue to which we will return later in this chapter and again in the case studies and concluding chapters.

**Table 1. ‘PM&E’ as defined by participants at the Philippines Workshop**

Core Concept	Definitions/Features
<i>Monitoring</i>	Knowing where we are Observing change Kilometre check Regular on-going assessment Routine reflection Feedbacking
<i>Evaluation</i>	Reflection process to look back and foresee Assessment of achievements/impacts over a longer period Learning from experience Valuing Performance review
<i>Participation (in M&amp;E)</i>	Shared learning Democratic process Joint decision making Co-ownership Mutual respect Empowerment

### ***Multiple purposes of PM&E***

Given that the approaches to participatory monitoring and evaluation are extremely diverse, it is perhaps more useful to group the range of purposes for which PM&E is being used, and in what types of contexts. This section discusses the differing purposes of PM&E and how these relate to each other. While there is nothing new about monitoring and evaluating change, the critical feature in a PM&E approach is its emphasis on *who* measures change and *who* benefits from learning about these changes. In PM&E, measuring change is used for different purposes, depending on the different information needs and objectives of stakeholders. These different functions include: 1) to improve project planning and management, 2) to strengthen organisations and promote institutional learning, and 3) to inform policy. Determining what is to be measured and for what specific purpose (or purposes) will ultimately depend on recognising and negotiating different stakeholder perspectives and interests.

### ***Measuring change for differing purposes***

Similar to conventional approaches, PM&E is generally used to measure changes resulting from specific interventions. The main difference is that in a participatory approach, stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in a programme take part in selecting the indicators to measure changes, in collecting information, and in evaluating findings. Measuring change can include tracking inputs, outputs, processes, and/or outcomes (impacts). It may also include monitoring intended and/or unintended consequences. This demonstrates what has been achieved, whether the needs of intended beneficiaries are being met over time, and whether the best strategies have been pursued.

In measuring change, PM&E provides information which is used to meet different stakeholder needs and objectives. Firstly, PM&E may be used for the purpose of improving **project planning and implementation**.. As a project management tool, PM&E provides stakeholders and project managers with information to assess whether project objectives have been met and how resources have been used (Campos and Coupal 1996). This helps in making critical decisions about project implementation and in planning future activities (PRIA 1995; UPWARD 1997). For instance, Sidersky and Guijt (this volume) describe how farmers in Brazil monitored on-farm changes that occurred as a result of a soil conservation programme and how these results are being used to inform future interventions. PM&E may be introduced at anytime throughout the project cycle, depending on stakeholder priorities and the available resources to establish the system, though others stress that PM&E should be made an integral part of the entire project cycle (see Estrella and Gaventa 1998).

While there are a number of PM&E experiences in the area of project management, PM&E is increasingly applied in newer contexts. This includes applying PM&E for the purpose of **organisational strengthening and institutional learning**.. PM&E becomes a process that enables organisations and institutions, including NGOs, CBOs and POs, to keep track of their progress and build on areas of work where success is recognised. This helps to strengthen organisational capacities of self-reflection and learning, which in turn enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of their development efforts. For instance, the case study in Palestine illustrates how participatory evaluation served as a basis for strategic planning and programme development within a local NGO working with agricultural communities (Symes and Jasser; see also Blauert and Quintanar; Carden; Ward).

Institutional learning in turn helps strengthen institutional accountability. In this context, PM&E is regarded as more a means of reporting and auditing, but rather as a means for demanding greater social responsiveness and ethical responsibility. Rather than being used solely by funding and government agencies as a way of holding beneficiaries and other project participants accountable, PM&E enables local stakeholders to measure the performance of these institutions and to hold them responsible for their actions and interventions. It is envisioned that if people are able to better articulate and advocate their needs and expectations, this helps ensure that their service delivery demands will be met. For instance, in several case studies, POs/NGOs and community residents are now working together with their elected leaders in formulating local development plans and assessing whether these achieve community development objectives (Espinosa; Rutherford; Torres). But also, NGOs/POs can develop their own accountability practice through PM&E approaches, by involving different groups of stakeholders (Carden; Ward; Symes and Jasser). In effect, PM&E can help build multiple accountability linkages across different institutional levels and stakeholder groups.

Another recent area of work in PM&E emphasises its potential role in helping to **inform policy**. For instance, in Colombia indigenous communities select their own development indicators (Espinosa). As a result, indigenous communities are better able to

communicate local needs and compare these against the development priorities of local government officials. In Mongolia, there are efforts to involve beneficiary groups in evaluating a national poverty alleviation programme (Gobisaikhan and Menamkart). Elsewhere, an evaluation of a national health programme in India, sponsored by USAID and the national government, included beneficiary organisations in determining whether key objectives of the programme were achieved (Acharya et al 1997).

In practice, as the case studies will show, PM&E is applied in a wide variety of contexts and combines these purposes to fulfil varying stakeholder objectives. Measuring change can take place beyond the project context, within institutions or organisations, for differing purposes. These multiple functions of PM&E are interdependent and often overlap. Determining the core purposes of the proposed PM&E system will essentially depend on different stakeholder interests and may well change over time.

### ***Recognising and negotiating different stakeholder interests***

In order to identify what is to be monitored and evaluated and for what purpose(s), PM&E uses a process that tries to offer forums that allow different stakeholders to articulate their needs and make collaborative decisions. PM&E enables people to understand ‘the views and values they share, work through their differences with others, develop longer-term strategies, and take carefully researched and planned actions which fits their contexts, priorities, and styles of operating’ (Parachini and Mott 1997). PM&E requires learning about people’s concerns, and how different stakeholders look at (and hence measure) project results, outcomes, and impacts. How these differing (and often competing) stakeholder claims and perspectives are negotiated and resolved, especially when particular groups and/or individuals are powerless *vis à vis* others, remains a critical question in building a participatory monitoring and evaluation process (see Gaventa and Blauert).

### ***Translating PM&E into practice***

There are a number of questions raised in undertaking PM&E: What are the key steps or stages in a PM&E process? Who should be involved and how? How often should PM&E take place? What tools and techniques should be used? Although there is wide variation in the actual practice of PM&E, some common guidelines are emerging which help define how PM&E is established and implemented.

### ***Establishing a PM&E process: steps, stages, and cycles***

There are at least four major steps or stages in establishing a PM&E process:

- Planning the framework for the PM&E process, and determining objectives and indicators
- Gathering data
- Analysing and using data by taking action
- Documenting, reporting and sharing information.

The planning stage is considered by many to be the most critical to the success of establishing a PM&E process. This is when different stakeholder groups first come together to articulate their concerns and negotiate differing interests. Stakeholders will

need to determine their objectives for monitoring, and identify what information should be monitored, for whom, and who should be involved. In Brazil, knowing who will use the information was a critical step in determining what should be monitored and how results and findings would be applied (Sidersky and Guijt). Often, however, stakeholders are left out of this initial planning process.

Once stakeholders agree on objectives, indicators for monitoring will need to be selected. In many cases, different stakeholder groups usually agree on a set of common indicators, while in other cases multiple sets of indicators are identified to address different information needs of different stakeholder groups (Blauert and Quintanar; see also MacGillivray et al, 1998). While there are no set rules to select indicators, one guideline is to use the acronym ‘SMART’: indicators should be *s*pecific, *m*easurable, *a*ction-oriented, *r*elevant, and *t*ime-bound. Another contrasting acronym recently offered is ‘SPICED’: *s*ubjective, *p*articipatory, *i*nterpreted, *c*ommunicable, *e*mpowering and *d*isaggregated (Roche, forthcoming). The acronym SPICED reflects a shift towards more PM&E approaches, placing greater emphasis on developing indicators that stakeholders can define and use directly for their own purposes of interpreting and learning about change.

The next step is data gathering. A wide range of participatory methods are used for monitoring and evaluating information<sup>4</sup>. The case studies in this book provide further examples of innovative techniques for PM&E (see Table 1 in Guijt, this volume). Many of these methods have been drawn from participatory learning methodologies, such as PRA, which comprise a range of audio-visual, interviewing and group work methods. They can also include quantitative methods, such as community surveys and ecological assessments, which are made more participatory and accessible to local people (Abbot and Guijt 1998; Espinosa; Rugh 1992; Lawrence et al). Others have adapted methods used in the field of anthropology, including oral testimonies and direct observation (Blauert and Quintanar; Feuerstein 1986).

Once information has been collected, the next step entails processing and analysing data, although ideally data analysis should take place throughout the data gathering stage (Gosling and Edwards 1995). The idea is to involve the relevant stakeholders to reflect critically on problems and successes, understand the impacts of their efforts, and act on what they have learned. What becomes critical is how stakeholders actually use information in making decisions and identifying future action.

The final stage involves documenting and reporting information. This step serves as an important means of disseminating findings and learning from others’ experiences (Abes; Hamilton et al). One important issue at this stage concerns ownership and use of information. Traditionally, information has often been removed from their original source and taken elsewhere, usually to meet information requirements of funding agencies, government agencies and other outside institutions. This prevents local stakeholders from retaining ownership of the information and building their own knowledge base.

Figure 1 illustrates how participants at the Philippines Workshop described one possible sequence of steps in conducting a PM&E process, but there are other examples that portray how PM&E can be undertaken (see Guijt; Rutherford; Woodhill and Robins 1998). These steps form part of what many describe as the PM&E learning cycle. An essential feature of this cycle is the continuous process of reflection by stakeholders on what is being monitored and evaluated, where the process is leading them, and the lessons gained from their own successes and mistakes (Pfohl 1986). In practice, there are no hard and fixed rules or steps on how ‘to do’ PM&E, because local circumstances or stakeholder needs change and thus alter how the PM&E process will proceed. At the Philippines Workshop, participants observed that the PM&E cycle is actually part of a series of loops, recognising that the process is continually evolving and adapting to local contexts and information needs (Symes and Jasser). Participants from the Workshop further agreed that although the PM&E process may be cyclical, it does not necessarily start from the same beginning but rather builds on previous experience and moves forward as stakeholders learn what and how to evaluate (Sidersky and Guijt).

**Figure 1. Sequence of Steps in Developing PM&E, as illustrated during the Philippines Workshop**

***Emerging issues***

The literature and case studies reviewed contribute towards a more coherent body of knowledge about PM&E but also raise several issues about its practice regarding the need to:

- Clarify concepts of ‘participation’
- Identify appropriate methodologies
- Develop and build on capacity for PM&E
- Scale up PM&E and promote institutional learning

***Clarifying concepts of ‘participation’***

What most distinguishes PM&E from other more conventional approaches is its emphasis on the inclusion of a wider sphere of stakeholders in the M&E process. PM&E practitioners believe that the stakeholders who are involved in development planning and implementation should also be involved in monitoring changes and determining the indicators for ‘success’. However, there still remains great ambiguity in defining who stakeholders are, who should be involved, and to what extent or depth they can or want to be involved (Whitmore 1998). For instance, the M&E process may include beneficiaries as stakeholders, but still in practice pay little attention to marginalised groups, i.e. women, the poor, and non-literate.

Participants at the Philippines Workshop suggested establishing a common set of principles for PM&E, but what these core values will entail, how these will be determined, and by whom, remain open to question. Part of the problem 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*. While the

tendency is to emphasise the involvement of all stakeholders in all aspects of PM&E, this may not be realistic or desirable (see Campilan).

### ***Identifying appropriate methodologies<sup>5</sup>***

Translating PM&E into practice not only challenges concepts of ‘participation’ but also raises a number of methodological issues. These include issues associated with developing indicators, establishing new standards of ‘rigour’, combining different approaches and methods, and maintaining flexibility throughout the process (see Guijt).

While a great deal of documented literature on PM&E focuses on identifying indicators, the procedures for indicator development are not always clear nor straightforward, especially when different stakeholders with different priorities and needs are involved. As PM&E is increasingly applied in different contexts, there is a need to develop new types of indicators to monitor important aspects of development which are not traditionally assessed, namely ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’.

Another issue pertains to establishing ‘rigour’. It is often assumed that more conventional approaches are more quantitative and therefore achieve a certain degree of ‘rigour’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘replicability’. By contrast, participatory approaches are said to obtain more qualitative information that is locally meaningful, readily useful and context specific, but is said to be more ‘subjective’.. The question remains whether there are indeed inherent trade-offs in choosing more participatory approaches, specifically with regard to establishing ‘rigour’ (Hamilton et al; Lawrence, et al; Sidersky and Guijt).

There has been a great deal of emphasis on adopting a flexible approach to PM&E. However, this raises the question whether maintaining flexibility in PM&E can provide information that compares changes on a continuous basis over time and that is applicable for making generalisations, especially when tracking processes on a larger scale and area of coverage. Further discussion is needed to explore the balance between ensuring flexibility and providing uniform information to allow for comparability and generalisability.

### ***Developing and building on capacity for PM&E***

Although many acknowledge that PM&E requires considerable time and financial investment, few experiences actually document the amount of resources needed to build and sustain a PM&E process over time. These resource requirements include financial resources, as well as human resources in terms of commitment, effort and capacities to carry out PM&E.

There is further a need to identify the types of skills and capacities necessary for conducting and sustaining PM&E. Key questions asked by participants during the Philippines Workshop with regards to capacity building included: What type of capacity building is needed, for whom, and at what level (personal/individual, organisational/institutional, etc.)? What types of skills, knowledge, changes in behaviour and attitudes are required in conducting PM&E? To date, there is little

documentation available on the best capacity building approaches for PM&E, which can include formal trainings and hands-on experiential learning (see Johnson).<sup>6</sup>

### ***Scaling up PM&E and promote institutional learning<sup>7</sup>***

As PM&E involves a wider range of participants, stakeholders represented cut across different institutional levels and contexts. However, a key question is whether PM&E can be built into standard operating procedures of formal institutions (Armonia and Campilan 1997). Institutionalising PM&E necessarily calls for changes in organisational cultures and procedures, but explicitly challenges higher-level institutions or organisations (i.e. funding and government agencies) to become more receptive to sharing decision making power over limited resources (see Gaventa and Blauert).

There are two aspects with regard to scaling up PM&E: 1) the scaling up of micro level information, e.g. information generated at the community or project/programme level, and 2) increasing the area of coverage by PM&E. As PM&E is increasingly used to monitor and evaluate policy, this raises questions regarding how micro-level data generated from PM&E can be used to inform national and macro-level strategies and policies. Another scaling up issue pertains to the area of coverage. Few experiences demonstrate how PM&E can be applied in large-scale development efforts, which cover a wide area and involve several institutional levels and a large number of participants. What type of PM&E approach, or a combination of approaches, will be required to address the increasing complexity in scaling up PM&E efforts?

Whether or not participatory M&E is successfully established will certainly depend on a number of factors, including the willingness and commitment of all stakeholders, the availability of time and resources, a conducive external (institutional) environment, among others (Campos and Coupal 1996). However, there is a need to identify the different contexts in which PM&E is applied and whether there are minimum conditions that need to exist before PM&E will be successful. Participants during the Philippines Workshop raised their own questions: Would PM&E be as effective in project or programme contexts that do not initially incorporate a participatory approach in its original design and implementation? Under what conditions can what type of PM&E approach be used? What is the social, political, and institutional context of PM&E practice? How does PM&E practice differ when applied across different political environments, i.e. from centralised to more decentralised systems of government? When do we know imposing the practice of PM&E would be a mistake, e.g. by increasing vulnerabilities of already marginalised groups?

### ***Tracking a moving target***

This book provides an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of PM&E practice. The case studies do not offer definitive conclusions but rather tentative lessons drawn from in-depth experiences in PM&E. Although we know more about PM&E, much documentation remains to be done about these experiences and the people involved in such processes. The value of documenting such experiences lies in the recognition that PM&E actually goes beyond measuring changes but is also concerned

with building people's capacities to improve learning and self-reliance regarding their own development.

Part of the difficulty of documentation is that project or programme related work in a development context is usually on-going and constantly evolving. As the development work matures and responds to changing needs and circumstances, so too does the process of PM&E shift and adapt. For many practitioners and advocates who write about their experiences, documenting such a fluid PM&E process has proven to be a challenge. In many of the case studies presented here, monitoring and evaluation work is on-going; therefore, a case study can only capture glimpses of the entire experience, from which lessons are continuously being drawn. This means that by the time this book is published, many of these experiences may have already changed and evolved in their processes and directions!

As PM&E is increasingly applied in different contexts and in hundreds of development initiatives around the world, it gains multiple functions as people learn how to adapt, innovate, and experiment with participatory approaches. Because PM&E is an evolving field, this makes documenting PM&E experiences almost as difficult and problematic as 'tracking a moving target'. This book can move us perhaps one step forward towards better understanding experiences in the field of participatory monitoring and evaluation-while also challenging us to continue to innovate and improve its practice.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws mainly from the literature review by Estrella and Gaventa (1998) produced in preparation for the Philippines Workshop on PM&E held in November 1997. Other literature reviews consulted included those from Latin America, Asia and Africa (see Alcocer et al 1997; Armonia and Campilan 1997; PAMFORK 1997). Special thanks to Deb Johnson and Irene Guijt for their extensive comments and support in the final writing of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> DFID was formerly the Overseas Development Agency or ODA.

<sup>3</sup> Indicators are ‘signals’ which are used for simplifying, measuring and communicating important information (New Economics Foundation, 1997), and they reflect changes that occur as a result of a particular intervention. There are different types, namely input, process, output and outcome or impact indicators. Input indicators ‘concern the resources (or activities) devoted to the project’. Process indicators ‘monitor achievement during implementation and measure how resources are delivered’. Output indicators ‘measure intermediate results, for example at a point when donor involvement in the project is close to complete’.. Outcome indicators measure ‘longer-term results of the project and after donor involvement is complete’ (Walters et al 1995). In other words, outcomes are the expected (but also unexpected) changes or impacts resulting from a particular intervention. Criteria provide the set of broad guidelines for the selection of indicators. Indicators are usually selected according to defined criteria, which reflect the priorities and objectives of the individuals, groups or organisation that selects indicators.

<sup>4</sup> These are described in a number of available manuals and guidebooks on PM&E (see Aubel 1993; Davis-Case and Grove 1990; Feuerstein 1986; Gosling and Edwards 1995; GTZ 1996; Hope and Timmel 1995; Narayan-Parker 1993; Pfohl 1986; Pretty et al 1995; Rugh 1986; Selener n.d.; Stephens 1990; Walters 1995; Wadsworth 1991; Woodhill 1998). There is also a forthcoming book on PM&E tools to be published by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) another output from the Philippines Workshop.

<sup>5</sup> Methods should be distinguished from methodologies and approaches - although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Methods are the specific tools and techniques used for data collection and information exchange, in other words the ‘how-to-do-its’. Methodologies define a particular approach. They orient the user by providing a framework for selecting the means to obtain, analyse, order and exchange information about a particular issue. They define what can be known or shared as well as how that should be represented, and by and for whom this is done.

<sup>6</sup> Some experiences in PM&E training include workshops conducted by several NGOs, namely ACORD, ActionAid, Oxfam, and Center of Concern (CONCERN 1996). Recent

experiences in training for PM&E have been conducted in Vietnam (see Scott-Villiers 1997 for the training manual used). In 1998 IIRR offered an international course on PM&E.

<sup>7</sup> Although these terms are used inter-changeably, ‘institutions’ are distinguished from ‘organisations’. Drawing from Uphoff, “An institution is a complex of norms and behaviours that persists over time by serving some socially valued purpose, while an organisation is a structure of recognised and accepted roles.” (1992, Fn1) Essentially, an institution can also be an organisation, but an organisation rarely is an institution. For instance, a traditional authority, such as an elders’ council is an institution, but so is marriage. A school is an organisation, but an education system is an institution. The World Bank is an organisation, but has also become an institution for the norms and values it represents as much as for the influence it exercises.