

CHAPTER 6

MONITORING

🎯 Objective of Chapter 6

By the end of this chapter, you should feel comfortable engaging in a participatory monitoring process, using a series of tools and approaches, paying attention to key cross-cutting issues (security and protection, discrimination and minorities, impartiality and independence).

6.1 APPROACHING PARTICIPATORY MONITORING

The monitoring of programmes does not always occur, and seldom does it involve local stakeholders. But it is essential to managing problems as they arise during programme implementation, and to making necessary adjustments, which is a rather frequent procedure in a time of crisis or in a turbulent situation.

6.1.1 A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION: KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

A Security and protection

Monitoring processes can result in managerial matters and issues related to honesty being placed on the table in the course of the project. They can also highlight errors in the initial design, or difficulties that were not taken into account. Decisions have to be made, and action has to be taken, which might entail potential dangers for certain stakeholders, including those who have detected the problem or those who were responsible for it. People charged with monitoring social control-

mechanisms, for instance, are potentially at risk, especially in a context of social or political crisis. Therefore, they must be chosen carefully and supported in this task. During surveys of the population, anonymity can provide a certain amount of protection.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I make sure that the monitoring process does not create security problems for those involved?
- How can I make sure that the monitoring system takes programme-related security and protection issues into account?
- When necessary, how can I ensure that the anonymity of informants is maintained?

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B Discrimination and minorities

Throughout the monitoring stage, one should pay attention to whether the programme is leading to the inclusion or exclusion of particular groups. Although one should attempt to anticipate this in advance (in the design phase), the effects may not manifest until implementation. Consequently, it is particularly important to focus on this issue during the entire period of project implementation.

This entails listening to those who are 'voiceless', because they are marginalised, or because they cannot attend community assemblies, for instance. Creating the space for them to speak out is a delicate undertaking, which should take into account the ramifications that they may experience as a result, such as risks to their security or further stigmatisation. (See section 5.5.2.)

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I ensure that the monitoring process will record the views of marginalised groups?
- How can I ensure that poorly assisted groups will not be further marginalised or stigmatised due to the fact that they have complained openly during the monitoring process?

C **Impartiality and independence**

Being impartial and independent at this stage essentially necessitates listening 'to all sides' and garnering the perspectives of different population groups, which may perceive an intervention in different ways. Conducting a variety of focus groups and interviews, in numerous areas that have been affected by the intervention, and being transparent in the process, is one possible way of reaching various parts of the population concerned.

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? KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I ensure that the views of all groups and stakeholders are taken into account?
- How can I ensure that, by acting on certain recommendations, I am not being manipulated by particular groups?

6.1.2 FROM CONSULTATION TO FACILITATION

The table overleaf describes three different approaches to participation in monitoring.

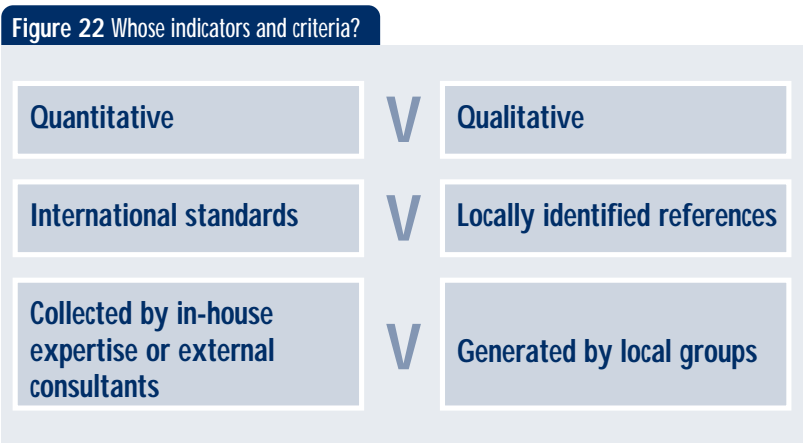
Table 11 Instrumental, collaborative and supportive approaches to participatory monitoring

Description	Potential benefits	Risks	Reminder
Instrumental			
Consultation with various stakeholders	<p>Taking into account the perceptions of the population</p> <p>Increased capacity to react and to adjust to the programme according to the situation</p> <p>You can consult with groups that would be excluded in the participatory process</p>	<p>You can be exposed to many complaints and demands. Low trust; people do not provide constructive information</p>	<p>Inform people of the objective of the exercise</p> <p>Provide feedback on the results of monitoring</p> <p>Explain how the information will be used</p> <p>Be ready to deal with complaints</p>
Collaborative			
Monitoring carried out jointly by your organisation and an associated structure (such as a local NGO or CBO)	<p>Taking into account the perception of the population</p> <p>Reinforcing local capacities (good in regard to recurring crises)</p> <p>Trust building</p> <p>In the long run, it can save time and money</p>	<p>Loss of impartiality depending on the choice of partner</p> <p>Can increase the cost and the time required at the start of the process</p> <p>Transparency may be more difficult to achieve for a local institution</p> <p>Local institutions may have difficulty explaining and implementing changes triggered by the monitoring process</p>	<p>If necessary, train local partners, focussing on the purpose and methods of monitoring, and the participatory tools that can be used</p> <p>Decisions on adjustments and reorientation resulting from monitoring should be taken in negotiation with the partner</p> <p>Difficulties should be managed jointly.</p>
Supportive			
Monitoring carried out by the affected population or associated structure	<p>Reinforcing the weight and recognition of local capacities</p> <p>Increasing appropriateness and ownership of the programme</p> <p>Trust building</p>	<p>Respect for your organisation's principles? Are certain groups being excluded?</p> <p>Local structures and populations engaging in their own projects may not necessarily consider the need to set up a monitoring system</p> <p>Local structure may be reluctant to share negative results with the population and donors</p>	<p>Know the context and the people you are supporting well</p> <p>If necessary, train people, focussing on the purpose and methods of monitoring, and the participatory tools that can be used</p> <p>As an external agency, your role may be one of facilitator, providing guidance on establishing and implementing participatory monitoring</p>

6.2 PARTICIPATORY MONITORING: KEY PRINCIPLES

Inclusion of the affected population and local actors in the monitoring process is a rich, yet risky endeavour. The external aid actor has to be ready to be criticised!

It is important to accept that known ‘good practices’ in monitoring may be challenged by the population and their local representative(s). The debate on monitoring indicators, for instance, might be a complex one. What should be the set of monitoring indicators? Those required by donors? Those required by NGO management? Or those identified by the affected population?



A few key principles make the process meaningful

Principle 1 Participation in monitoring has little meaning if the population or local actors have not been involved much earlier in the project cycle—that is, in the assessment, design and implementation phases.

Principle 2 One should be ready to accept that programmes will be monitored and measured against criteria put forward by the population and local actors.

Principle 3 Participatory monitoring implies that corrective measures recommended by participants are implemented and acted on. If this does not occur—and if the reasons for not doing so are not explained—the affected population might abandon the process, feeling that, again, it has been betrayed.

Principle 4 Monitoring processes are not ‘one-shot operations’, but activities that will take place throughout the life of the project. Make sure that local partners and affected populations understand this.

Principle 5 Transparency in the monitoring process has to be very high, from the design of the monitoring system to decisions taken when a problem has been detected.

Principle 6 It should be made clear from the beginning that the aim of monitoring is not to apply sanctions, but, rather, to facilitate readjustments, when necessary. However, if illicit activities are identified during implementation, sanctions may, nevertheless, be required.

6.3 THE DESIGN OF A PARTICIPATORY MONITORING PROCESS

▶ **Participatory monitoring is an exercise that occurs throughout the project's duration.** It can be conducted through different mechanisms, with different partners, and it can have different objectives. Consequently, it is important to clarify the different parameters of a monitoring system, that ideally takes place at the design stage. (See chapter 4.)

These parameters concern:

- goals;
- criteria and indicators;
- stakeholders and their role;
- methods to be employed; and
- the means required for monitoring.

Table 12 Parameters of participatory monitoring

Parameters	Questions
Parameter 1 Definitions of the purpose of monitoring	<p>Is it to assess the programme's relevance from the affected population's standpoint?</p> <p>Is it to appraise whether needs have changed or not?</p> <p>Is it to identify the effects of the intervention on a specific set of problems?</p> <p>Is it to be informed of the quality of the programme?</p> <p>Is it to be aware of the developing impact of the programme (positive and negative)?</p> <p>Is to adapt the intervention to the actual situation?</p> <p>Is it to compare the evolution of activities with the initial action plan?</p> <p>Is it part of a learning process aimed at preventing the recurrence of error?</p> <p>Is it to keep an eye on the population's level of satisfaction?</p>
Parameter 2 Definitions of the indicators to be used	<p>What monitoring criteria and indicators should be used?</p> <p>Those required by donors?</p> <p>Those required by NGO management? Or a set identified by the affected population?</p> <p>Is it possible to elaborate on these indicators and criteria collectively? How and with whom?</p>
Parameter 3 Identification of the different stakeholders in a participatory monitoring process	<p>Are there local mechanisms or institutions, accepted and recognised by the population, which could play the role of 'intermediary'?</p> <p>Is it preferable to engage directly with the population?</p> <p>Will it be necessary, for practical reasons, to engineer the emergence of local intermediaries?</p>
Parameter 4 Definitions of the methods to be used	<p>Is it possible partly to incorporate monitoring into traditional decision-making and problem-solving mechanisms?</p> <p>Are there any existing and known social-control systems? Is it possible to involve them in the monitoring process?</p> <p>Is it possible to identify collectively an analytical framework for monitoring, including identification of monitoring criteria, indicators and benchmarks?</p> <p>How will the results of monitoring be used?</p>
Parameter 5 Identification of the means required	<p>Can we identify the physical means and human resources needed for the process, from among the stakeholders involved in monitoring and from among aid organisations?</p> <p>How can they be mobilised? How can responsibility for mobilising them be shared?</p>

The key questions that should be asked when defining these parameters are presented in the table opposite.

6.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MONITORING PROCESS

6.4.1 THE PROCESS

- ▶ During implementation, the monitoring system is engaged in an **ongoing process**, comprising three steps.

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Table 13 The three steps in a monitoring cycle

Steps	Questions
Step 1 Actual observation and information recording process	Will the process be implemented directly or in partnership with a local actor? In the latter case, what will the terms of the contract be? Which participatory tools will be used? How can we ensure that certain 'voiceless' groups are not excluded from the process? Will the process be credible and safe enough for the 'discontented' to express themselves without fear? Will the process be perceived as rigorous enough for its conclusions to be credible?
Step 2 Feedback and decision-making	How will feedback and decision-making on changes and reorientation be given? Will a specific session(s) be organised for this purpose? Will there be enough time for people to digest the findings and to react?
Step 3 Use of the results	How will participants be informed of how their views have been taken into account? Is it possible to establish a participatory system to follow up on implementation of the recommendations generated by the monitoring? How can the safety of groups involved in the monitoring process be guaranteed? And how can the risks of stigmatisation or social tension be minimised?

In Choco (Colombia), WFP observation committees, made up of members of the population, are responsible for monitoring the food-distribution process, including lists of those to be assisted from the affected population, product quality, quantities dispersed, and the time and date of dissemination. This method of work allows the WFP to reduce its inspection efforts and to strengthen its bonds with the community. Observation committee members call or correspond with the WFP frequently.

6.4.2 THE TOOLS AVAILABLE

Certain tools have been experimented with and are seen as potentially useful and effective in regard to participatory monitoring. They are listed below, along with their specific objectives and advantages, and their limitations and constraints.

6.4.3 PARTNERS IN THE MONITORING PROCESS

A Choosing a partner

In regard to monitoring, it is very important to choose the most appropriate partner. Regardless of the kind of actor (international or national NGO or CBO, for instance), its staff will be involved, sometimes deeply, in the monitoring process. Control of, or involvement in, a monitoring process can indeed be a source of power. Certain choices can have detrimental consequences. Structures that are perceived as non-representative, or are known to have inappropriate past records, have to be avoided at all costs. Structures that cannot access key segments of the population (such as women and other ethnic groups) should be utilised in conjunction with other bodies, which do not suffer from the same limitations.


 In addition, care should be taken to ensure that structures involved in participatory monitoring do not abuse the opportunity in order to gain power over the population or other institutions; structures that might have vested interests or hidden agendas should thus be avoided. This is an especially sensitive matter in a context of armed conflict.

Table 14 Tools available for participatory monitoring

Objectives and advantages	Limitations and constraints
Focus groups, roundtables and meetings	
<p>Enable open discussions to take place.</p> <p>Help to reinforce links with the community and to create a climate of trust.</p> <p>Depending on the issue, it is necessary to have either good representation of different segments of the population (in terms of age, gender, activity and social group) or to have strata-specific groups.</p> <p>Note that sensitive subjects like HIV or breastfeeding practices are not discussed in the same fora as road building and security!</p>	<p>Sometimes these techniques can lead to the masking of the views of those who do not dare to speak.</p> <p>Special skills in observation, social analysis and group management are thus required.</p> <p>In many situations, the results of the focus groups have to be triangulated through other participatory mechanisms.</p>
Individual interviews	
<p>Individual interviews and the collection of eyewitness accounts allow for the development of a more intimate view of the issues at stake and engender awareness of ideas that might not be easily expressed in larger groupings or in public.</p>	<p>It is rather time-consuming and requires both discretion and sensitivity, given the protection issues that could arise.</p>
Surveys	
<p>Participatory surveys are an essential tool. A prerequisite for their success is joint elaboration of objectives, the drafting of questionnaires, and collective identification of the quantitative sample.</p>	<p>Questionnaires have to be simple and culturally adapted. The survey team has to be chosen in a participatory manner in order to avoid post-survey claims of bias and complaints.</p>
Mechanisms to protect anonymity	
<p>In some contexts, certain issues (such as human-rights violations, especially against women or children) may require participatory mechanisms that protect anonymity. Anonymous questionnaires, for example, which can be collected discreetly and put back in public boxes or sent through the mail, can be used in certain situations.</p>	<p>Discretion and caution are sometimes vital to the survival of those individuals who have been ready to participate. Unfortunately, this hinders double-checking and the triangulation of certain information.</p>
Monitoring days	
<p>Visits to programmes, 'open days' and field trips to different communities, followed by discussion and social events, are very interesting ways to stimulate exchanges and to extract opinions.</p>	<p>While these are both time- and resource-consuming initiatives, they are very effective (if not necessarily efficient).</p>
Feedback mechanisms	
<p>Providing feedback to stakeholders is central to participatory monitoring. The groups, committees and mechanisms established for monitoring constitute very good channels for providing either an oral or written response. In most instances, a preferred option is to hold a meeting where there can be discussion about the exercise, its methodology, its findings and how the recommendations will be implemented.</p>	<p>Feedback is a risky endeavour if the capacity to implement changes required as a result of the monitoring process is low.</p> <p>Both successes and failures have to be acknowledged.</p> <p>All stakeholders should be formally invited.</p>

Where acceptable intermediaries do not emerge or cannot be identified, it is necessary to identify what culturally and socially acceptable collective problem-solving mechanisms exist, and to negotiate how to work with them.


B Establishing a steering committee

Where there already is a certain amount of social organisation and a practice of electing or designating committees, setting up a steering committee for the monitoring process can be a very effective way of ensuring the existence of an independent, but well-accepted and well-respected, monitoring mechanism. But beware of the tendency for 'committology'! Aid agencies can create committees that have no roots in the social setting, and, therefore, have a low level of legitimacy.

C Working through traditional assemblies

This is extremely useful in ensuring that the population can be informed through existing communication channels. Hence, information should be available in local languages and via culturally acceptable media.


In such cases, the role of your cultural bridge—for expatriates, this can be a translator—is essential. His/her personality, the way he/she is perceived, and his/her capacity to create empathy will significantly affect the quality of the dialogue and the reality regarding local stakeholder involvement in the monitoring process. It is vital that these fora are also used for feedback exercises throughout the monitoring process.

 Last, but not least, working through these traditional mechanisms implies a commitment that conclusions and recommendations will have a visible impact on the project. Otherwise, people can feel betrayed.

D Working with social-control mechanisms

Make sure that everyone is aware of the programme design and their entitlement, such that people who feel unhappy or betrayed can always complain. This is monitoring through social control.

While very effective in certain societies, this can lead to more problems than it solves in other settings, creating tension amongst the population. For instance, social-control mechanisms are important in validating choices, ensuring opportunities to control corruption and inequity, and limiting the risk of nepotism and patronage. Full transparency, from the design stage to the monitoring phase, is critical for social-control mechanisms to function.

 Security and protection issues that might affect those in charge of the promotion of social-control mechanisms are the main potential counter-indicator to social control.

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6.4.4 LISTENING ... TO THE VOICELESS, THE DISCONTENTED, THE 'COMPETITORS' ...

A Listening to various perspectives ...

In the midst of participation, certain groups tend to be overshadowed. These usually comprise the poor, the landless, the discontented and people of the 'wrong' age, gender, cast and ethnic group. It is important to ensure that the entire participatory process takes into account their existence, their needs and their views, notably in relation to monitoring activities.

- **The voiceless** These people are not represented in the leadership; they are often not, or only loosely, organised; they are simply too afraid to speak. Make sure that the process does not leave them behind! But think of their security and protection before encouraging them too strongly to go public. If this precaution is not straightforward and clear, people are likely not to get involved, or they may be taking risks if they do so.
- **The voice of the 'discontented'** This group usually has two types of reaction: either they are forcefully vocal; or they discretely leave the programme. Even if a group of unsatisfied stakeholders tries

to monopolise the discussion, do not forget to include the silent group.

- **The voice of the 'competitors'** Knowing what other agencies and actors in the same field think of the programme is another very useful component of participatory monitoring. It is crucial to incorporate these views into the debate with the main stakeholders – that is, those assisted by the programme. Sometimes, the fact that one point has been raised by another agency can open up new avenues of debate and prevent what could have been a dangerous 'face-to-face' confrontation between the aid provider and the recipient.

B Managing claims and complaints through participation

Participatory management of claims and complaints is one possible process to be included in programme monitoring. In relation to distribution processes, for instance, there are always discontented people, even if they have had the opportunity to request to be on the target list. Accusations of unjust inclusion of certain families, or unfair treatment of others, will always be levelled. An ad hoc participatory mechanism might have to be thought through well in advance, and established on time to deal with this.

One way to proceed with the design of a claims/complaints mechanism is through a series of focus groups, composed of a representative sample of the population, in terms of gender and age. This exercise should be followed by a large-scale public campaign to make people aware of the decisions that have been made. An alternative is to identify and work through local 'problem-solving' mechanisms and authorities.

In Somalia, there are several accepted problem-solving processes and instruments for redress. They are often controlled by intra-clan or inter-clan mechanisms, which have proved to be resilient and are well respected. They are based on a system of values, rules and duties, which is enshrined in a

traditional law known in the north of Somalia as 'Xer Issa'—the Law of the Tree.

In Rwanda, the traditional system is the *Gacaca*, which was reactivated as a reconciliation mechanism following the 1994 genocide.


6.5 THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATORY MONITORING

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6.5.1 INFORMATION SHARING AND TRANSPARENCY

Given the fact that participatory monitoring is a time-consuming undertaking, the population will be willing to commit itself on a continued basis only if the flow of information is fluid, and the data are relevant and consistent.

This can take various forms: notice boards; public meetings; distribution of leaflets; and public announcements through the media.

 Maintaining a transparent and continuous flow of information on monitoring is not without certain dangers. Indeed, it publicises errors and failures and constraints and difficulties, as much as it does successes! It might also underline certain responsibilities and specific attitudes of key stakeholders. Putting this in the public arena can be risky. So be careful and do not be 'over-communicative'!

6.5.2 MONITORING SHOULD LEAD TO ACTION

 A basic piece of advice is: do not get involved in participatory monitoring if your organisation is not ready to take it seriously, to listen to the results, and to act on them.

6.5.3 TIME MANAGEMENT

Monitoring can be extremely time-consuming for aid actors, for local leaders and for the population. Furthermore, although the population's enthusiasm for the project and its willingness to be involved is strong in the early stages, the momentum is gradually lost, especially when difficulties and delays occur in the implementation phase, making it more difficult to encourage people to participate. Be careful not to overdo it!

The same people often take responsibility for organising and structuring initiatives and for being the interface with external agencies. In **Colombia**, these local leaders are so overstretched that they have difficulty feeding their families. Their motivation may occasionally lie in power dynamics and ambition, but, most frequently, it is the result of genuine commitment and a degree of pressure from the population, which recognises the person who can best defend its interest. This can lead to burn out and to lack of efficiency of key participants.

6.6 CONCLUSION: PARTICIPATORY MONITORING, A 'PLUS' IN MANAGEMENT

Participatory monitoring is not a simple process, but, if it is implemented well, it can contribute, to a large extent, to your programme's success. The main issues that need to be addressed in relation to participatory monitoring, and the tools available to do so, are summarised below.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN OF MONITORING STRATEGY

Did you involve the various stakeholders in the design of the monitoring process, in order to define:

- objectives?
- indicators?
- the stakeholders involved?
- the methods to be used?
- the means required?

Focus group on the design of the monitoring methodology

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MONITORING

Three steps: information collection; feedback and decision-making; and the use of results

Information collection

Did you manage to involve all stakeholders?

Did you manage to hear all of their voices?

Were the participatory tools appropriate?

Are the quantity and quality of the information collected adequate for the monitoring exercise?

Feedback

How will the evaluation results be fed back to the population?

Use of results

How will the results be used?

Will recommendations and decisions made be acted on?

Working with a partner

Establishment of a steering committee

Working through traditional structures

Social-control mechanisms

Focus group on the evolution of the situation and needs

Structured and semi-structured interviews

Surveys

Storytelling

Box for the collection of complaints

Social audit

Monitoring days

Focus groups on programme adaptation

Communication and information tools

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATORY MONITORING	
Information sharing and transparency Did you inform people sufficiently and at the appropriate time?	Evaluation of the monitoring process
Linking monitoring with action Is the exercise satisfactory in view of changes in the situation and to needs? Is it necessary to identify new ways of re-adjusting the programme?	
Time management Is the monitoring process time-effective and will it lead to changes?	