Introduction to project monitoring in community development

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This material is from a monitoring manual:
Cookingham, Frank G. (1996). "Principles for monitoring transformational development."
Monrovia, CA: World Vision International.

Some material specific to World Vision International has been omitted to emphasize the material that I believe is useful for development facilitators in other agencies. With permission I have added some notes that are clearly marked, and I have formatted the content to stand alone.

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Acknowledgements

Several individuals helped me clarify my ideas about monitoring. Bob Burke, World Vision West Africa Regional Office, co-facilitated two monitoring workshops with me. His explanations of key concepts to the participants and his conversations with me as we planned the workshop activities were very helpful.

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The development facilitators and managers who participated in monitoring workshops for WV Mali, WV Chad, the WV Asia Region Office in the Philippines, and for representatives from twelve national offices in the Asia region suggested many of the examples in the guide. The exercises and critiques that they completed helped me bring my lofty academic ideas down to earth and express them in more practical terms. The development facilitators and managers who participated in a workshop in El Salvador also helped me to clarify several ideas.

February 1994

This revision reflects my thinking after facilitating a workshop for WV Kenya area development program managers. Concepts related to transformational development have been added, and some material interesting to me but not very practical has been deleted. The basic approach to monitoring remains the same, but WV Kenya development facilitators helped me sharpen my discussion of standards. Some editing has been done to make key ideas more visible. May this material bring glory to God through your work.

May 1995

This revision reflects my thinking after participating in planning and evaluation workshops sponsored by the East Africa Regional Office in August 1995 and March 1996. Until now the approach has been based primarily on logical framework analysis. Now I believe that a balance is needed between logical framework analysis and appreciative inquiry. I have clarified the relationship between logical framework analysis and this approach, and I have described principles for an evolutionary monitoring system consistent with appreciative inquiry proposed by Rick Davies. I have modified the discussion of transformational development to reflect the ministry policy on transformational development adopted by the WVI Board of Directors in September 1995. I have added material based on the work led by Sam Voorhies to develop ministry standards in Africa region, material based on the work by WV Tanzania to develop community capacity indicators, and material based on work in Latin America region led by Caroline Kroeker to improve project documentation. May this additional material be a blessing to your work.

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Transformational community development features

[Note 2014. Framing transformational development is an ongoing process in World Vision International (WVI). Various documents were prepared after 1996 to describe features of transformational development that were particularly important to WVI at that time. The list of features in this section illustrates transformational development as I understood it in 1996 as Director of Evaluation at WVI. WVI may describe the way it practices transformational development with a different list of features, but both lists will have a holistic view of development ministry undergirding them.

Myers (2011) has written the classic text for understanding transformational development. I recommend it highly.

> Myers, Bryant L. Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development. (2011, revised and expanded edition). Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books.]

End of Note ....]

There are different approaches to community development that are being practiced by development agencies. Clarification of the central ideas that guide the development work in particular programs and projects is essential before useful monitoring systems can be designed.

The principles and tools in this approach are designed for transformational community development. Most of them, however, can be applied to other community development approaches.

Fundamental principles in transformational community development include:

- Completing project goals on time within budget is secondary to facilitating respectful and caring relationships in the community.

A project is a coordinated set of opportunities to facilitate individual and social transformation. Project outcomes may improve quality of life for some people. But if project implementation does not encourage and enable individuals to develop spiritually and groups to take responsibility for doing what needs to be done over the long term for individuals and groups to thrive in all types of circumstances, then the project is not transformational development.

- Development activities are based on freeing people from limitations in their communities that prevent them from achieving their potential to love God and neighbor.

Limitations are found in individuals, families, communities and society. Facilitating development involves working with people to become aware of limitations in their situation, and working with them as they become empowered to overcome those limitations. Examples of limitations include feelings of unworthiness or a sense of powerlessness, greed and selfishness, and social, political, economic and religious structures which oppress or exploit individuals and groups instead of enabling them to live together in just and orderly ways.

- Development is a process by which people in community work together to move toward a better future. In this better future the basic needs of all people are met in a way that deepens their relationships with God and each other.

Working together is critical both in creating vision for a better future and changing the current situation so that it is more like the emerging vision.

- It is intended that facilitation of development will lead to outcomes associated with community-based sustainable development that responds especially to the needs of those who are typically overlooked or marginalized.

Transformation of society toward peace and justice is always in view while facilitating transformational community development.

Exhibit 1 gives examples of desired outcomes that are associated with community based community development.

Exhibit 1. Outcomes associated with community based sustainable development.

Benefits from development activities are distributed equitably.

Community improvements are compatible with maintaining ecological integrity in the environment.

Community members have the knowledge and skills required to acquire necessary resources for development.

Local leaders are capable of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating affordable appropriate development activities.

The community is in partnership with other communities in the area to address the area-wide root causes of poverty.

Community members have a vision that extends their potential to overcome various hindrances to development.

Representatives from all community groups are participating in decisions about community development.

Local institutions (including government ministries) are capable of providing needed services.

Local agencies are in networks for sharing knowledge and experience.

Community members are able and willing to maintain appropriate technologies.

Community improvements are compatible with social and cultural patterns for assuring accountability and integrity.

Concentrate monitoring on four areas

In this approach to monitoring I recommend that four areas receive special attention. The first area is project staff performance. A fundamental principle of transformational development is that the project manager, facilitators and other project staff must model the key values associated with transformation in speech and action, and especially interaction within relationships Thus, they need to monitor their own attitudes and behaviors to know how well they are aligned with the principles of transformational development.

The second area is <u>conditions in the community and surrounding areas.</u> The purpose of monitoring these conditions is to avoid imposing agency deadlines, way of working, or priorities for quality of life on the community. Monitoring community conditions can alert project staff to discrepancies between the way things are and the way things should be as a community manages its development, so that they can be responsive as facilitators who model transformational development values.

The third area is <u>achievement of community objectives that are related to basic needs</u>. Some community objectives may be relatively superfluous in relation to basic needs; focus limited resources for monitoring on those objectives most related to meeting basic needs.

Fourth, monitor the <u>effectiveness of efforts to strengthen the community's capacity to manage its own development</u>. This is essential for sustainability.

There is no perfect information system

Much valuable time can be wasted trying to design a perfect monitoring procedure that will work in a variety of projects. No one procedure can provide a variety of managers with the information they need to make sound decisions.

Therefore, it is more helpful in the long run to have operations staff and project personnel acquire skills in creating and adapting simple monitoring procedures on a project-by-project basis.

Too much information causes problems

At least two important problems may be caused by collecting too much information.

First, collecting and processing information is expensive in terms of staff time. In particular, a high degree of precision in data is very costly. Often a high degree of precision is not needed to make sound operational decisions. Monitoring becomes more effective as the ability increases to know when approximate information rather than precise data is sufficient.

Second, resources allocated to monitoring cannot be allocated to directly facilitating goal accomplishment. Emphasis should be placed on collecting information that is immediately relevant for keeping implementation on schedule, or consistent with the overall aims for development.

The approach is a modular approach consistent with logical framework analysis. It is based on preparing a group of simple monitoring components or modules. This group of modules is like a catalog of tools for collecting information related to specific standards. This catalog can be continually expanded as other information needs become apparent.

To be practical, at any given time only a few components from the catalog are used to check project implementation. Selection of the components should be guided by the state of the project and experience with typical problems that arise in projects in a similar state.

Definition and purpose of project monitoring

Evaluation can be defined as the facilitation of informed judgments by stakeholders about the merit or worth of something, based on verifiable evidence. If program implementation itself is being evaluated, then the activity is called monitoring.

Definition – Project Monitoring

Monitoring is defined as the provision of verifiable information to participants, staff and managers for making informed judgments about the merit or worth of project implementation. Monitoring should assist stakeholders avoid problems in implementation, as well as recognize potential that should be encouraged.

From another perspective monitoring is a process for reviewing continuously and systematically different aspects of project implementation to determine if planned activities are affecting the intended people according to schedule. Typical aspects to review include:
- who is benefiting from the project and who is not benefiting,
- deliveries of needed resources,
- financial expenditures,
- provision of products or services as prescribed in the project design,
- work schedules,
- achievement of short-term objectives.

When projects are funded through grants or contracts, monitoring also includes determining systematically if there is compliance with laws and regulations for implementing the grant or contract.

The basic purpose of a monitoring procedure is to alert managers and others to actual or potential problems in implementation so that adjustments can be made.

A secondary purpose is to provide information regularly on progress toward achieving desirable results, which allows project evaluations to explain results at a deeper level. Monitoring information can be used to refine a project design for other communities, or to provide guidelines for effectively implementing the project design. In other words, detailed monitoring information assists people in other settings to implement a similar project effectively and efficiently, based on actual experience.

Another secondary purpose it to provide information regarding accountability. Donors, boards of directors, senior managers, fundraisers and other stakeholders need to know what is actually happening in a project. Then they can determine if legitimate expectations are being met.

In this approach emphasis is placed on identifying problems early so that they can be resolved before costly disruptions or delays occur in the work. Although information obtained through monitoring can be used for routine status reporting, it is argued that the precious time available for monitoring activities is best allocated to aspects of the work where problems are more likely to occur.

Final introductory note; persevere!

Development facilitators in various countries have told me that the content of this approach is not easy to understand. It certainly hasn't been easy for me, in dialogue with others, to clarify my ideas about monitoring and express them in ways that are helpful to development facilitators. Given the complexity of facilitating development that leads to empowerment of people, that plants seeds which God can use in transforming individuals and society, why should we expect monitoring of development work to be simple or easy? May your journey, difficult as it is, take you to more effective ministry with the poor.