

Community-Led Documentation and Reporting System



Documenting decisionmaking and project processes is seen by IFAD and local governments as essential for securing community participation in the implementation of development projects. However, limited capacities and high illiteracy rates pose significant constraints to the adoption of a standardised approach to documentation and monitoring by the community. Involving beneficiary communities in monitoring and tracking changes is important in IFAD-supported projects. In response, two community participatory tools tailored for communities with limited capacity were developed:

(1) the voucher-based expenditure monitoring system and the (2) participatory process monitoring system. These tools were developed and used by the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) in India. They were used by communities to document their decisionmaking process and to track the effectiveness of project actions. As a result, the involvement of local communities in monitoring project progress was significantly enhanced.

Why voucher-based expenditure monitoring system?

OTELP was designed to devolve as much responsibility as possible for planning, budgeting and implementation to local communities. The voucher-based expenditure monitoring system was developed for use by semi-literate or illiterate communities, providing them with direct project management experience when working with donors and government. The instrument was developed to simplify the process of documenting and collecting information regarding project activities.

The voucher-based expenditure monitoring system is a simple template-based tool to report expenditures incurred each month, based on activities planned by each village.

- Expenditures are categorised into purchases of goods or materials and wage payments made to improve productivity of land, water and forest resources.
- Each payment generates a voucher that indicates the details of the purchase (e.g., who sold the materials, the price and the purpose of procurement). Similarly, payments made for labour indicate the number of persons working, duration of work and the results achieved.
- A summary of the vouchers is recorded in a single-page format, with all necessary details (voucher/muster roll number, case record number, name of the activity, amount paid, etc.). This data entry is usually done once a month and the results are reported to the Village Social and Financial Audit Committee for approval. These forms are collected and consolidated by participating facilitators and NGOs, who verify the data.
- The case record booklet is structured according to the flow of the project's implementation steps (see Figure 1).

OTELP: A brief background

IFAD, along with Department for International Development (DfID) and World Food Programme (WFP,) supported the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) in Odisha, India, in 2003. The aim was to ensure that the livelihoods and food security of poor tribal households are improved and self-managed through sustainable utilisation of available natural resources and through off-farm/non-farm enterprise development. The programme is operational in 30 blocks of 7 southwestern districts of Odisha, India, where these two tools have been piloted and adopted.

Case record

The case record is a booklet where sequences of templates are organised in a manner that enables the Village Development Committee (VDC) follow the steps required to implement project activities. The purpose is to create documentary evidence of the implementation of the activity. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for community members to adopt a management practice to achieve better results and take corrective action which is the foundation of results-based management.

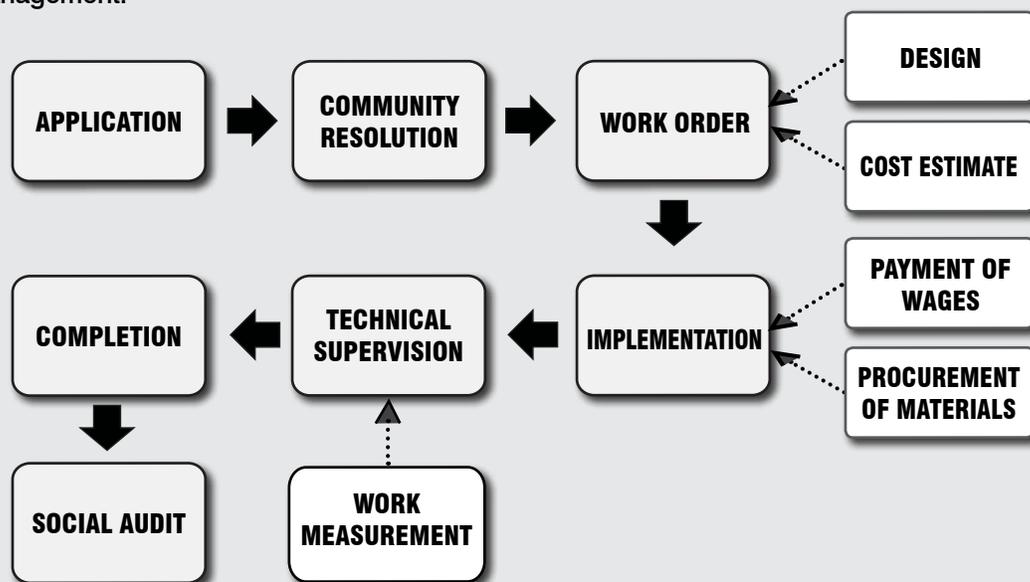


Figure 1. Documentation flow in a case record used for the Voucher-based expenditure monitoring system.

Impact on the community

The voucher-based expenditure monitoring system is not merely about generating documented evidence of activity implementation. It also provides community members with valuable experience in project management; it enables the community to take corrective actions, ultimately providing better results.

The templates are the unique added value of this tool. These are number-coded and developed in the local language. Data entry is entrusted to the youth of the village, who are trained to fill out the templates. Illiterate women who are interested can also participate in the training. As a result, semi-literate or illiterate community members are able to contribute to the monitoring process and are able to participate more actively in project implementation.



Challenges

The laborious documentation and file updates are very time-consuming for the community. Also, enhancing the numerical skills of the illiterate youth posed an initial challenge to the facilitators. But, with additional training sessions, the youth volunteers became well-versed with the process.

Participatory process monitoring system

The participatory process monitoring system is a tool applied annually by the communities to measure the effectiveness of planning, implementation and monitoring of project interventions. The key objective is to track how community members/institutions are adhering to all the outlined steps of the project. Specific parameters have been developed for each process step. For each parameter, three evaluation options are described in pictorial form (low, average and high). During a village meeting, community members give a score to the parameters and provide explanations for the grading of performance. The activity is implemented in one day (known as Self-Evaluation Day, Atma Samikhya Divas), with 30–40 beneficiary families. The number of participating beneficiary families is intentionally kept low to ensure adequate and effective participation by each family.

Predefined steps are adopted by the communities in the application of this tool. The event is hosted by the Village Development Association (VDA) (a community-based organisation where one male and one female adult member from each household participate).

- The executive committee of the VDA and VDC, consisting of 12–15 community members, make a presentation on the progress and the completed activities. During the presentation, beneficiary families discuss the activities, sharing their comments and raising potential concerns.
- Different categories of beneficiaries can participate in the meeting: individuals, families and self-help groups.
- The participants visit the intervention sites to verify the completion of the work and the results.
- At the end, the community reconvenes to discuss about the visit and assess the quality of the intervention as well as to consider the steps needed for further improvement.

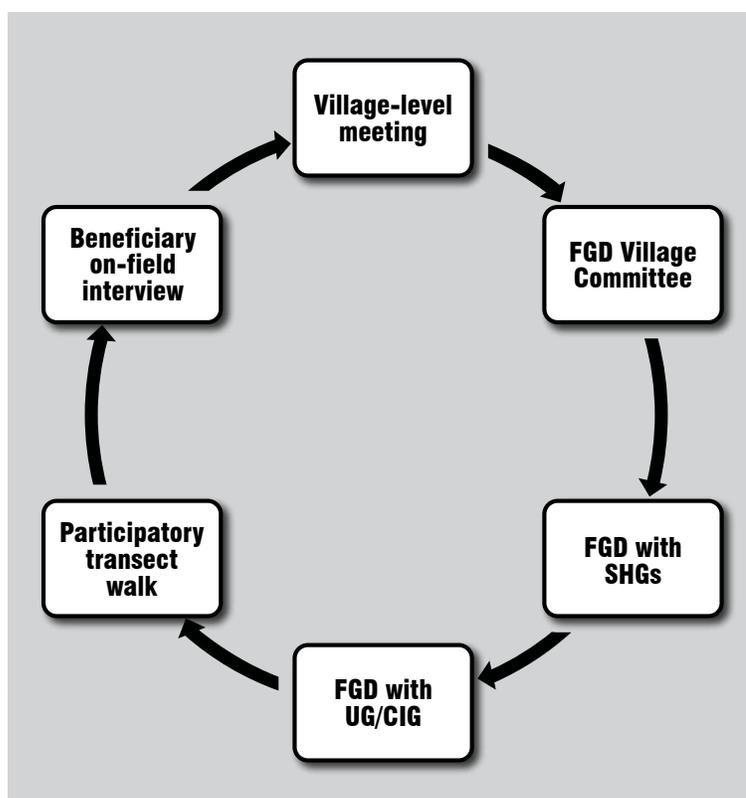


Figure 2. Sequence of steps followed for participatory process monitoring.

The process involves predefined steps and utilises participatory tools, such as focus group discussion (FGD), village transect walk, and community meetings.

The quality of the implementation processes and outcomes is categorised into seven areas/parameters (see Box 1). These indicators are ranked by the community members in the village meeting and compared with the previous year's results. These indicators are also used for knowledge sharing with other stakeholders, like NGO staff and government officials, enabling participants to discuss successes or failures of the intervention. This approach helps strengthen community members' knowledge and understanding of project interventions.



Thematic areas that serve as parameters for monitoring

- a. Institutional aspect
- b. Community organisation
- c. Project management
- d. Participatory implementation and monitoring
- e. Financial aspects
- f. Capacity building of stakeholders
- g. Empowerment-centered plan

One of the most innovative features in this process is the ranking of indicators by community members using a colour-coded grading system (red for low performance, yellow for average and green for high performance of project actions). Using colour-coded ranking facilitates monitoring by illiterate participants. In addition, pictures, photographs and drawings are also used to describe the different values of the indicators.

The results are entered into an Excel template to generate a web diagram for comparison with results from previous years. The analysis is shared with the communities to stimulate reflection on the long-term impact of the project. As participation in the M&E exercise is mandatory, it ensures that all beneficiaries are involved and engaged in assessing project impact and in planning and making decisions about subsequent actions.



Challenges

Gathering all village members for an entire day can be a daunting task. In large villages (more than 50 families), the exercise was done in clusters of families. During the initial years of project implementation, conflict arose as the project could only engage a limited number of families in the villages. Also, differences in capacity between different NGOs and organisations that consolidated the village-level data posed challenges in ensuring data integrity and validity. This problem was addressed by providing capacity-strengthening support to facilitators.

Lessons learned

- By dividing community members into groups and linking these beneficiary groups with the specific livelihood intervention, the participatory monitoring exercise increased the beneficiaries' sense of ownership over the assets/interventions.
- Management and technical know-how of the beneficiary groups also increased, which resulted in improved management and decisionmaking processes during implementation.
- By using a broad spectrum of parameters/indicators, the participatory process monitoring system was able to capture a wealth of different opinions from the beneficiaries on the different aspects of project planning, implementation and monitoring.
- The use of multiple visual cues proved invaluable in engaging and securing inputs from members of the community with the lowest levels of formal education and literacy.

References

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CIG	common interest group
DFID	Department for International Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MPR	monthly progress report
OTELP	Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme

PSU	Programme Support Unit
PPM	participatory process monitoring
SHG	self-help group
UG	user group
VDA	Village Development Association
VDC	Village Development Committee
VLSC	Village Level Sub Committee
WFP	World Food Programme

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Bio-sketch and contact details

Pravanjan Mohapatra

Utkal University, India

Email: pravanjan@rediffmail.com

Mobile: +91 94 37 18 98 14

Correspondence: PSU-OTELP, 2nd Floor, TDCC Building, Bhoi Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Pravanjan Mohapatra, BS (Physics), MBA has more than 12 years of experience working with the private sector, NGOs and the government. He is currently working as programme officer (Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation) at Odisha Tribal Empowerment & Livelihoods Programme (OTELP), which is supported by IFAD, DFID and WFP. His principal duties are designing MIS and M&E systems, knowledge management and knowledge sharing, participatory processes and capacity building.