MAKING OF FIELD LEARNING REGISTER AND FIELD OBSERVATION SCHEDULE: THE TOOLS FOR PROCESS MONITORING

Sada Hussain Shah[i]

Ph.D. Sociology,
Sr. M&E officer DWHH, Sindh, Pakistan

Abstract:

In field of monitoring and evaluation, process monitoring is always essential. Process monitoring is necessary in order to ensure the quality and standards of activities. If the activities are not conducted as per standards, then talking about results will be like finding black cat in a dark room. Results are always based on the implementation and quality outputs and proper use of these outputs by the communities. Let suppose, in a project of food and nutrition security if any organization is distributing goats and M&E department has just counted the number of goats distributed against target. They have not monitored the process of distribution to answer the questions; *"if the goats were healthy, if they were weighed and vaccinated at distribution point?"* At the end of project evaluation report says that there was no any visible impact on nutrition of beneficiaries with the distribution of goats. The reader of the report will have first the impression that the project impact hypothesis was wrong; *"distribution of goats is not helpful in improvement of food and nutrition security of rural communities"*. However, there can be the possibility that few of the goats died just after distribution and/or few of the goats were over aged to reproduce further. If these could be the possibilities then question raises: where could be these reviewed? And the answer is, when the goats were distributed. To feel the importance of process monitoring, team of Deutsche Welthungerhilfe based at Sindh, Pakistan decided to develop most effective and qualitative tools for process monitoring. Two tools were developed and implemented through partners working in field. One was Field Learning Register (FLR) which is kept in the offices of partners and being used by everyone to write down their learnings during implementation of activities in field. Other tool was checklist for spot checks of activities which was being

[i] Correspondence: email shahsada84@gmail.com

used online through Akvo-Flow software. Later, on that check list was replaced with Field Observation Schedule (FOS) now it is being used for process monitoring of different activities at the time of implementation. Field learning registers is helping to decide about implementation of project activities and refine the beneficiary criteria. Field observation schedule is helping to shape up the approach of managing and conducting project activities. Concept of field observation schedule was taken from the idea of observation schedule (Bell, 2010).

Keywords: field learning register, field observation schedule, process monitoring

Acronyms

A+C	Activity and Context
C+M+O	Context, Mechanism and Output
Dr.	Doctor
DWHH	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe
FLR	Field Learning Register
FOS	Field Observation Schedule
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
Ph.D	Doctor of Philosophy
RDF	Research and Development Foundation
SF	Sukkar Foundation
TRDP	Thardeep Rural Development Program

1. Introduction

The word monitoring is derived from Latin word '*monere'* that means to warn or to remind Soma Kaushik (1995). This definition of monitoring is the base for making both of the tools for process monitoring of DWHH projects in Sindh, Pakistan. FLR is developed to collect learnings or hurdles faced to implement daily activities with certain approach in specific context. With purpose of to provide feedback on implementation approach of activity to suggest any changes or indorse current way of conducting activities in specific context. Whereas, FOS was developed to give feedback regarding the process conducting activities in field. With purpose to give feedback on how the activities are being taken by the beneficiaries in field.

Analysis FLR depends on two things approach of activities and specific context (A+C) this concept ideologically rooted in theory of realistic evaluation. The term 'realist evaluation' is drawn from Pawson and Tilley's seminal work in 1997. Realistic

evaluation is based on analysis of context, mechanism and outcome (C+M+O) (Pawson and Tilly, 1997). Analysis of FOS is based on community feedback, output and way of doing activity. Theoretically, it is rooted in the theory of structured observation. For systematic participant observation, a checklist can be developed to specify your points of observation (Bell, 2010). Both of the tools are qualitative and flexible in nature and can be modified according to the needs of project and context. DWHH Sindh team has taken lot of benefits in learning and deciding on regular basis throughout the life of project, while using these tools since mid of 2016 till September 2017.

2. Objectives

- To develop a qualitative tool for process monitoring,
- To develop a tool to collect field learnings on daily basis.

3. Methodology

The experiment was conducted in project of food and nutrition security being implemented by DWHH through partners in districts Tharparkar and Umerkot of Sindh Province of Pakistan. Method of developing tools for process monitoring was divided into three phases, desk work, field work and review.
- Desk work, the review of existing material and development of tools.
- Field work, about implementation of tools through implementing partners.
- Review or feedback on tools was collected through a workshop in which all the implementing partners participated and tools were finalized for future use.

3.1 Universe
Districts Tharparkar and Umerkot of Sindh Province, Pakistan.

4. Findings

4.1 Field Learning Register (FLR)
In the first stage, FLR was developed and shared with three different types of implementing partners. After one moth key learnings came out by the field team, few were regarding the approach of activity one was regarding beneficiary selection criteria. After the successful experiment, all three implementing partners (TRDP, RDF & F) were called in a workshop to develop the definition of field learning and how it can be captured. Field learning refers to anything positive or negative that is experienced

during the implementation of activity. A learning is a registering to recommend re-plan the ongoing activity and to develop the strategy to coming projects and share with stakeholders. A learning can be registered during the activity or within reasonable time after activity. A learning can be registered in field diary or/than in learning register. Field staff, ME staff, Management, External visitors and/ or WHH visitor can register a learning. Learning is important to be registered because it tells a way forward of current and next project. Learnings can be reported to management WHH and other stakeholders (if possible). A learning can be used to improve current program and to design future program. A learning is set to be used if it brings a change in design of current/coming program. It is moments of joy to see learnings which collected are incorporated in project design.

4.2 Field Observation Schedule (FOS)

After a few months of using FLR, implementing partners were asked to start with process monitoring of activities. In the initial stage, a checklist was developed using online data collection system (Akvo-Flow) for process monitoring. On the basis of our learning at few cash distribution points, we replaced our online quantitative check lists for process monitoring with observation schedule. We have a feeling that process monitoring is qualitative that cannot be covered using AKVO-Flow or any other quantitative checklist. Hence, all the M&E officers and managers were provided new tool (FOS) to conducted process monitoring of distribution activities. This is open format can be used for observation as well as reporting, it is also open to add any other observation or observation hint/s under any theme.

FOS is a qualitative tool that can be used for process monitoring of cash distribution points especially when it is being distributed by hiring mobile cash services/ banks in Pakistan. The observer must be trained and well oriented of purpose, criteria and protocols of cash distribution. Data against each theme can be collected using multiple means as possible, such as, discussion with project team/ beneficiaries, observation of location, questioning with local villagers at the site or any other reasonable source. The overall purpose is to seek complete, coherent and logical data against each theme.

4.3 Logical Structure of tools

Logical structure explains about what information these tools are intended to get and how. Both tolls are different in logical structure FLR is a tabulated matrix and FOS is a simple guide or checklist to collect data.

4.4 Field Learning Register (FLR)

In field learning register there are nine columns; each column is a question or theme and each row is supposed to arrange answers/ data against each question. Column one is about the date when the learning was registered, column 2 ask the name of project under which the learning was collected, next column ask to specify the activity where learning was collection, next column (4) is very important that ask about the specific learning in field. Next two columns 5 and 6 do collect the method of dealing with learning, column 5 asks about what the way out was used in field, in case no way out was used then next column-6 asks for what you suggest to do in this situation. The rest of the three columns are actually for the use of M&E to trace the registered learning. Column seven asks the name of person who registered the leaning, column 8 asks to specify his/her role and final column is to put signature.

This learning register can be kept in any field office and all the staff should be trained on how to register a learning. M&E person should review the register on regular basis and extract the key learnings those can be adopted earlier for better implementation of project.

5. Field Observation Schedule (FOS)

Like any other tool of qualitative study, FOS is very general and flexible tool of data collection. The number of themes and observation hints can be changed as per specific needs. But logically it is structured, the question to ask or observe are divided into two columns. Column one reflects the theme, here by theme we mean the broader question of monitoring. Next to that column is observation hints, these hints can be asked or observed from any source. These hints are actually to structure or facilitate or specify you observation. Thus, these hints depend on themes given in column. Under pair of these columns there is a row where data collector can take notes which must answer the theme and hints above. After data collection and entry in the template by removing the column of observation hints one can have a thematic report of process monitoring of any activity. The tool given in appendix-A was made for the observation of cash distribution point in a dry hot region. One can use this format for process monitoring of any kind of activity such as, construction, livestock vaccination, training session so on. Tool given in appendix-A can guide you to develop theme and observation hints regarding any particular activity of your project. For example, theme-1 is about the location of distribution and observation hints do guide the M&E person to collect data about ownership of location, space, type and structure, arrangements of water, tent and thermos-balancing and any gaps to cover. Similarly, if you are going to monitor the

construction than theme will remain same but observation hints will change. In case you are going to see the activity which has no requirement of location such online training course for university study then you will require to change of remove the theme-1 (location).

6. Conclusion

After field experiment on both of the tools with three different partners in different projects for one year, it has been proved that both the tools are best for process monitoring and/or quality assurance. Process monitoring is very important to make sure the quality and results of any project. If the project is not reviewed and feedback is not provided on real time, then it will be counted in lack of strong monitoring. Evaluation can give you the overall learnings that can be used for future projects but success of current project is totally dependent on process monitoring.

For the guidance of readers both of the tools are given in appendices below, appendix-A is and FOS appendix-B is FLR.

7. Recommendations

- Learning register tis general tool to collect routine learnings from daily activities which can be used for any project at any office,
- Observation schedule is also a general tool that can be used to spot check any project activity in field with minor changes in observation themes and/or observation hints.

References

1. Bell, J. (2010). Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science. New York: Open University Press.
2. Kaushik, S. (1995). Anthesia, Concepts and Management. New Dehli: Japee Brother medical publisher.
3. Pawson. R & Tilley. N. (1997). Realistic Evaluation. California: Sage Publications ltd.

Appendices

Appendix A - An Observation Schedule

Theme 1: **Location of distribution point**	Observation hints: ownership of location, space, type and structure, arrangements of water, tent and thermos-balancing, any gaps to cover.
Take notes here:	
Theme 2: **Method of distribution**	Observation hints: process to cover by each beneficiary to receive cash, time in process, types of formalities, situation of rush at each stage of process, beneficiaries' feelings about process, any gaps to cover.
Take notes here:	
Theme 3: **Timing of distribution**	Observation hints: number of distribution staff, number of beneficiaries, time on each beneficiary, time when distribution started and when closed, relate the distribution time with local security and environment context, any gaps to cover.
Take notes here:	
Them 4: **CRM is in place**	Observation hints: any CRM desk at DP, display of complaint number, access of beneficiaries to CRM, dealing of CRM by team, beneficiaries remarks of CRM, any gap to cover.
Take notes here:	
Theme 5: Learning and/or best practices	Observation hints: any activity or input that is observed best during distribution, any activity or input that is applied in modified way as per the project theory.
Take notes here:	
Recommendations:	

Date (DD/MM/YY)	Observer	Signature

Appendix B - Field Learning Register

Field Learning Register (This needs to be filled on the basis of need/ learning)								
For the use of Field staff only								
Prepared by PME-WHH-Sindh								
Date	**Project**	**Intervention / activity**	**Learning**	**Way out adopted**	**Way out suggested**	**Staff name**	**Designation**	**Signature**
Insert (DD/MM/YY)	Short name of project	Particular activity	Anything that restricted execution of field activity.	How you dealt with that restriction	If restriction was not handled, what solution you propose to handle?	Write your name	Designation + your project	Sign here, please.