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**PRIA**

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**Participatory Impact Assessment**  
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## 1.0 Understanding Social Development

The words like *Impact, Monitoring and Evaluations* have been in the development discourse for than one decade now. As NGOs continue to play important role in development, such words attain greater meaning. There has been increasing concern about NGOs' performance in social development. The question like - how does one know what has happened in public good, how one can measure the process of change, is it easy to trace the pace of transformation etc. have confounded many NGOs. The evaluations of the projects and programmes when taken up demonstrate the achievements in particular fields, and such interventions are largely seen as 'donor driven'. Most NGOs feel forced to take up evaluations not because these were considered important for institutional learning but the next instalments and future course of funding largely depended on evaluations. Generally the words like monitoring, evaluations and impacts are used interchangeably, in reality and practice all three are related but have different meanings. Before untangling the threads of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, it is necessary to understand their relationships with social development.

The meaning of development has undergone many changes in fifty years. In 1950s, the development was synonymous with per capita growth, industrialisation and economic growth. Post world war witnessed emergence of World Bank and International Monetary Fund ( Bretton Woods Institute) to restructure the war ravaged economies. In 1960s, the thrust was placed on human welfare and well-being. Incorporation of social aspects in development planning got an impetus, within the United Nations the shifts was observed with the recommendation of Economic and Social council (ECOSOC) to set up Social development Unit (1962) and integrate economic and social aspects of development.

The decade of seventies was the decade of participation. By 1970s, it was realized that benefits of economic growth were not reaching the poor. Alma Ata's declaration of Health had reaffirmed people's rights and duty to participate individually and collectively in planning, implementation of health care, which was a fundamental right FAO's world Conference on Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development (WCARRD) in 1979 called for involvement and Organisation of grassroots rural people and stressed rural poor's participation in the institutions and systems which govern their lives as a basic human rights. Growth of Participatory Research and Participatory Action Research as struggles against monopoly of knowledge thus were important achievements of the decade. The work of Paulo Freire, Fals Borda, Ivan Illich contributed towards legitimising 'popular knowledge'. Participatory research and Participatory Action research focused on the importance of learning and organising as vehicles of empowerment. Conscientisation, which includes process of collective action and reflection by the people, was an important component for achieving empowerment.

Sustainability became an integral component of development debates by eighties. And for the first time the statements on participatory development began to be made by bilateral and multilateral agencies. By 1990s, participation got an important focus of development strategies, learning group on participation was set up by WB in 1990 to identify challenges in incorporating participation in operation, ADB also developed a framework for mainstreaming participatory development processes into Bank's operations. United Nations also initiated several debates and dialogues. UNDP introduced the concept of HD Index (HDI) which incorporated longevity, knowledge and income. UN also contributed towards participation by organising no of international conferences on development issues including Social Development summit in Copenhagen with three core issues - eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment and social integration.

The Decades	Emphasis on
“Growing” Fifties	Economic Growth
“Social” Sixties	Human welfare and well being
“Participatory” Seventies	People’s rights and their inclusion
“Green” Eighties	Sustainability
“Human” Nineties	Participation

**Source: History of Participation, Namrata Jaitli, 1997**

Looking at this development trend, social development attains a deeper meaning than just economic growth as perceived earlier. The social development signifies some kind of positive action to redress inequalities in the society. It clearly demonstrates ‘change and transformation’ from the existing situation to a situation which is ideal. Efforts to promote social development often leads to the question how it could be monitored and evaluated. It was slowly realised that dominant views of evaluation and blue print approaches were rather inadequate to capture the outcomes and impact of the practices.

Social development is not a linear and predictable process which can be understood by a supposedly causal input – output - impact relationships. Programmes and projects are the basic instruments of development intervention but we cannot base the evaluation of social developments merely upon the supposed outcomes and impacts; they are not the only instruments of promoting social change (Uphoff 1989; Roche 1994). Social development has to be understood more broadly and hence explanations of its outcomes and impact have to employ a number of both quantitative and qualitative approaches and not merely seek to measure direct programmes and project outcomes.

The following box is drawn from a number of statements and documents on social development from a range of social development agencies.

<p><b>Common Objectives of Social Development Program</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Poverty reduction:</b> not just in terms of increased production but also in terms of helping poor people gain access to the resources necessary to sustain their livelihoods.</li> <li><b>Human Development:</b> in the sense of better education, health and family planning.</li> <li><b>Participation:</b> the means by which poor people can be directly involved in development process which could affect their lives, both negatively and positively.</li> <li><b>Empowerment:</b> in the sense of helping poor people to extent their areas of knowledge and perhaps to acquire new skills and abilities which could enable them to better defend and promote their livelihood.</li> <li><b>Women’s social and economic development:</b> and the promotion of gender equity to ensure access to resources and development benefits.</li> <li><b>People’s rights:</b> as enshrined in written constitution and democratic processes, and the right of particularly vulnerable groups such as children, ethnic, minorities and refugees.</li> </ol> <p><b>Source: Outcomes and Impact: Evaluating Change in Social Development; Peter Oakley, Brian Pratt and Andrew Clayton)</b></p>
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## 2.0 Meaning of Impact Assessment

**Impact** concerns long-term and sustainable change introduced by a given intervention in the lives of beneficiaries. Impact can be related either to the specific objectives of an intervention or to unanticipated changes caused by an intervention; such unanticipated changes may also occur in the lives of the people not belonging to the beneficiary group. Impact can be either positive or negative, the latter being equally important to be aware of. (Blankenberg 1995a)

**Impact assessment** refers to an evaluation of how, and to what extent, development intervention cause sustainable changes in living conditions and behavior of beneficiaries and the differential effects of these changes on women and men. Impact assessment also refers to an evaluation of how, and the extent to which, development interventions influence the socio-economic and political situation in a society. In addition it refers to understanding, analysing and explaining process and problems involves in bringing about change. It involves understanding the perspectives and expectations of different stakeholders and it takes into account the social-economics and political context in which the development interventions take place. (Hopkins 1995b)

**Participatory Impact assessment (PIA)** is a process of evaluation of the impacts of development interventions which is carried out under the full or joint control of local communities in partnership with professional practitioners..... In PIA, community representatives participate in the definition of impact indicators, the collection of data, the analysis of data, the communication of assessment findings, and especially, in post assessment actions designed to improve the impact of development interventions in the locality.' (Jackson 1995-96)

According to PRIA's experiences, the participatory impact assessment is a process which engages all the stakeholder groups, most importantly community in assessing the change that any development intervention is bringing on their lives. Impact measures the change, not only the effort and effectiveness.

All Fowler in the given table has tried to bring out the difference between outputs, outcomes and impact.

Point of Measurement	What is Measured	Indicators
Outputs	Effort	Implementation of activities
Outcome	Effectiveness	Use of outputs and sustained production of benefits.
Impact	Change	Difference from the original problem situation.

Most of the methodologies have not been able to distinguish between effect and impact indicators. NOVIB and OXFAM had carried out a research programme on Impact assessment and mentioned that, 'It is important to highlight the fact that impact assessment is an activity that is carried out throughout the project cycle. It should be present at almost every stage of the project. What changes, however, the nature of the exercise. In the preparatory stage (identification, design and appraisal), before the project, starts, impact assessment attempts to anticipate the consequence of the project. It is an exercise concerning the consequences that the project is currently having on the beneficiaries. It is continuous process of information

gathering, which should allow adjustments in the implementation of the project. Information should be relevant, timely accurate and usable. In the last two stages the emphasis is in examining the consequences that the project had on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries.'

### IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN THE PROJECT CYCLE

STAGE	TASK	WORK ON IMPACT ASSESSMENT
<b>Identification</b>	Identify main problems, needs and potentials	Preliminary assessment of expected impacts
<b>Design</b>	Define aims and objectives and how to achieve them. Establish the activities to be carried out and the institutional structure	Assessment of expected impacts of the project on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries
<b>Appraisal</b>	Critical assessment of the relevance, feasibility and potential effectiveness on the basis of financial, social technical and environmental analysis	Detailed review of the previous impact assessment study
<b>Implementation</b>	The project is set in motion	Impact monitoring: collection and processing of impact indicators to assist project management decision - making
<b>Completion</b>	The projects ends	Analysis of the results of the project in connection with objectives and the livelihoods of beneficiaries
<b>After completion</b>		A retrospective assessment of the impact of the project sometime after the completion of the project

**Source: OXFAM and NOVIB: Research programme on Impact Assessment, First Phase, Rarel Hopkins, 1995**

The impacts of projects and development interventions on women have to be specifically analysed in order to be more gender sensitive. The following framework takes four stages of project into consideration.

### GENDER DIMENSION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

<b>A. Project impact on women's activities</b>
1. Which of their activities (production, reproduction and maintenance, social-political) does the project affect?
2. If it plans to change women's performance in some activities, is this feasible, and what positive or negative effects would it have on women?

<b>B. Project impact on women's access and control</b>
1. How will each of the project components affect women's access to and control of the resources and benefits stemming from (i) productive activities, (ii) maintenance of the human resources and (iii) socio-political functions?
2. What forces have been set in motion to induce further exploration of constraints and possible improvements?
3. How can the project design be adjusted to increase women's access to and controls of resources and benefits?
<b>C. Project implementation</b>
1. Are project personal aware of and sympathetic towards women's needs? Are women used to deliver the goods and service to women beneficiaries? Are there opportunities for women to participate in project management positions?
2. Does the organisational structure encourage women's access to resources? Does the organisation have the institutional capability to support women during the process of change?
3. Is preferential access to resources by male avoided?
4. Does the organisation have enough flexibility to adapt its operations to meet the changing or new-found situations of women?
<b>D. Project evaluation</b>
1. Does the project's monitoring and evaluation system explicitly measure the project's effects on women's?
2. Are women involved in designing the data requirements?
3. Are the data collected with sufficient frequency so that necessary project adjustments could be made during the project?
4. Are women involved in the collection and interpretation of data?
5. Are data analysed so as to provide guidance to the design of other project?

**Source: Adapted from Overhold et. al. (1985)**

## DEFINITIONS OF MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION

### **Monitoring**

Monitoring is a systematic and continuous assessment of the progress of a piece of work over time.

### **Review**

A review is the assessment at one point in time of the progress of a piece of work. The basic purpose of a review is to take a closer look at the piece of work.

### **Evaluation**

An evaluation concentrates specifically on whether the objectives of the piece of the work have been achieved.

**Source: Toolkits: A practical guide to assessment, monitoring, review, and evaluation: Save the children, 1995**

In absence of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems, Impact assessment becomes difficult. 'It is also important to consider that a process of M and E is not a question of techniques and instruments. Any assessment of the outcome and impact of social development projects must also include as assessment of the organisation which is running or managing the project. There is a symbiotic relationship between social development agency and project and both must be included in any exercise of evaluation'.

M and E may appear to be related to past exercise but are very critical to understand the future. Many factors outside the project also influence the intended impact. In some cases the projects may lead to changes in the short term, or some unintended changes are not at all considered, such as impacts on people's lives. For instance, a project on agriculture can aim at increasing land conditions and increasing crop yields but it may not specify the burden on women and the impact on girl child. Increased production may not necessarily increase women's status within the society.

## **3.0 The Key steps involved in Impact Assessment**

### **3.1 Agreement on Need: Why Impact Assessment**

The first step to carry an impact assessment is a jointly felt need about the assessment. All the stakeholders including the communities, NGOs, donors and other agencies must realise the importance and need of such exercise. Unless objectives are clear, the chances of being top heavy are maximum. This process involves negotiations and collaborative decision making among the stakeholders which also leads to strengthening the capacities.

### **3.2 Indicators of Impact**

After building an understanding the objectives, the next step is identification of indicators to assess the impact of development interventions. Since the process is participatory, it is important to have the indicators from all the stakeholders groups. The selection of indicators will largely depend upon what is being assessed, who the end users are and how information will be used. The attempts need to be made to specify qualitative indicators as well.

**Indicators:**

- An indicator is sign/tool that communicates information
- Indicator is a sign which tells how people think and feel
- Indicator is a variable whose purpose is to measure change in a phenomena or process against planned objectives
- Indicator is a factor which can change in quality, quantity or size.

**Purpose of Indicator:**

- To help take decisions
- To help describe and understand change
- To communicate change
- To aid setting, or at least reflect priorities
- To monitor impact

**Quantitative Indicator-** Consist of measurement in number(as percentage, rate, ratio)

**Qualitative Indicator-** Descriptive statements about the process and outcomes of, for instance, participation or other practices in human relations.

Descriptions of attributes, traits, or characteristics which are not in themselves quantifiable, e.g. decision making, group solidarity

**Indicator should be :** Specific, simple, measurable, achievable/accurate, reliable with a time frame

**Type of indicators**

**Input ---- resources**

**Activity indicators ---- output (effort)**

**Result indicators ----- outcome (effectiveness)**

what we will deliver

**Project Purpose indicators (project) ---- effect (change)**

why is it needed

**Overall objective indicators (development) ---- impact**

why it is important

**Source: Participation in Development workshop, IDS, 1998**

**3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

A wide variety of methods and techniques could be used to gather the data once the information needed and objectives are clear. The choice of methods will also depend upon the context and the purpose of impact assessment. It is also important that all stakeholders and most important communities are involved in collecting the data about the impact.

The following are some of the methods to collect information:

**Participatory learning methods**

If PRIA exercises were taken up at the planning stage of the project, similar methods could be employed to assess the impact. The pie exercise on agriculture income at the planning stage could be assessed later as well. If the interventions through projects could change the patterns

of income and livelihood later. If the seasonal calendars earlier had depicted the epidemics in particular seasons, then some health projects could at the later stages take up the similar exercise to know whether the project could help in checking the outspreads of the diseases.

### **Auto Visual Techniques**

Use of videos, story telling, popular theatre, Songs, photovoices are some of the methods used in assessing changes, In the participatory Impact evaluation of the Nepal Resource management project, drama performances and songs were used to help identify villagers perceptions of changes in their communities as a result of the project. A package was also developed by Udyogini an NGO in India working on the issues of women's empowerment and livelihood to assess the changes through pictorial response booklet. The changes brought were assessed by women producers and the implementing agencies.

### **Focus group Discussions**

Through this method, groups can be brought together with similar social characteristics (women, children, farmers) or mix of people (different gender). This helps in getting a degree of approval, some negotiations do take place, some rationalisation and analysis of opinions generated also takes place in the process.

### **Social Surveys**

Surveys are good at answering questions of 'how many' They can be used to assess the impact of a programme where it is possible to produce simple question or other measurable indicators (number immunised, number of women getting loans, number of people sending their children to school). In community surveys, local people can be involved in deciding what information could be obtained, how and when to obtain information and for what purpose.

### **Interviews**

Structured and unstructured interviews could be used as methods. Structured interviews rely on predetermined set of questions while unstructured interviews allow the space for flexibility. It helps people to put things into their own words.

### **Reporting and Existing Monitoring systems**

If the monitoring systems are developed and there is practice to document the changes against the indicators, the process of measuring the impact becomes easier. This largely depends upon the nature of monitoring system. If internal monitoring takes into account communities indicators and proper documentation (cases) help in assessing the impact in longer run.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation is a method tried out by anthropologists for collecting data and studying social process by participating in day to day local activities. It holds one very strong strength in that it permits to record and monitor the changes in a society from very close quarters. It could be used as complement to other methods

### **General Lessons on Methods for Impact Assessment**

1. Put the client first.
2. No single method should have a monopoly of us.
3. Best use in to mix and match methods according to needs and group.
4. Attain a wide spread of perceptions from different stakeholders.
5. Participatory, qualitative methods help improve our understanding of impact.
6. Retrospective methods can provide some data; not ideal but better than nothing.
7. Need baseline, control groups, good appraisal, and needs assessment to be certain of impact assessment.
8. It is hard to do impact assessment without prior information (either from a baseline of monitoring, project files, clear objectives, etc.)
9. Participatory methods need facilitation skills.
10. Analysis of data is crucial. Who does the analysis? Different stakeholders should be brought into this.
11. Participatory methods are not the same as a totally participatory process.
12. Time is required to gain trust and get into process evaluation.
13. It may be better to separate impact assessment from normal PME as these procedures/ approaches are often not conducive to impact assessment.
14. Objectives must be clear at level of output, effects and impact.
15. Be firm in pushing forward with the impact assessment despite opposition and difficulties.
16. Cross-check information from different methods.
17. Keep the system as possible without sacrificing accountability to both the client and the donor.

**Source: Outcomes and Impact : Evaluating Change in Social Development; Peter Oakley, Brain Pratt and Andrew Clayton)**

### **3.4 Methods of data analysis**

The data collected needs analysis as well. Usually the communities involvement in this step is totally ignored and the onus completely lies with either donors or NGOs. The community has to be encouraged to participate in data analysis. This step also depends largely on the ways the data is collected.

### **3.5 Learning and Lessons**

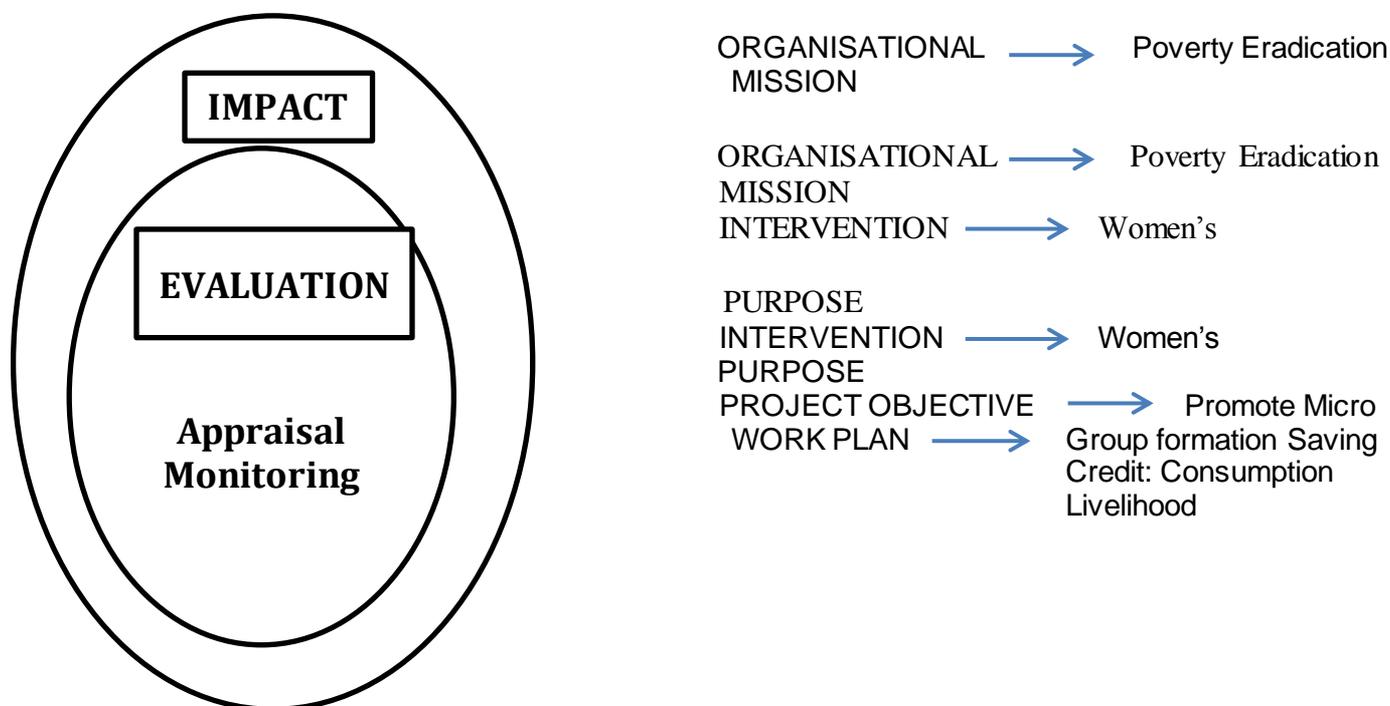
The final stage is reporting and compilation of the lessons. The challenge is that how the data has to be presented to be useful to all those involved in the process. This also depends on how the information will be used. For the local communities, the communication of analysis has to be simpler and more through visual techniques. The compiled learning will help in deriving future strategies by the organisations.

## **4. Relevance of Impact Assessment**

### **4.1 Learning to enhance linkage between mission – purpose – objective**

The impact assessment helps in building linkage with the organisation mission and the objectives. Adopting a programme or a project by NGO is related to its organisational mission. For instance an organisation having a mission of poverty eradication can choose to work upon microenterprise and empowering women. The same mission can be shared with by other

organization who may have different intervention purpose to achieve the organisational mission. For example an organisation, if is working on microenterprise, the impact of the interventions has to be seen in relation to the achievement of the mission, not at the level of the project. In this case, the real impact would be if the interventions helped in reducing poverty. The diagram below depicts clearly the relationship.



The inner circle depicts the evaluations at the level of the project while impact circle is much wider and takes into consideration the effect on development problems. The evaluations will measure the empowerment and whether the project could enable to promote microenterprise while impact will assess the poverty reduction in a particular context. Impact assessment helps in relating to the development problem which are often not taken into consideration.

#### 4.2 Negotiation among Stakeholders

This exercise helps in bringing all stakeholders together to discuss the issue from their perspectives. This also provides scope for negotiation among stakeholder groups on needs, expectations and interests. This approach emphasises on the participation of communities to speak for themselves. Different perspectives help in understanding the project from different point of views and impacts could also means different to different people affected by the project. Partnerships between different stakeholder groups are also strengthened in this process.

#### 4.3 Empowerment of Primary stakeholders

Involvement of communities/beneficiaries in impact assessment could be empowering. It is an attempt to redefine bottom up, people controlled process and not a top down or donor controlled process. This approach helps in including those who are powerless, voiceless and marginalised with those who are powerful, visible and assertive actors. Analysis of impacts itself gives way to conscientisation and action. This helps in a greater sense of ownership, commitment to the purpose and enhanced faith capacities to accomplish the purpose.

#### **4.4 Capacity building of NGO**

This kind of assessment also strengthens the capacities of NGOs to take up impact assessment processes later in their organisations. It creates learning process to build institutional learning. Participatory Impact assessment also emphasises on organisational capacities; were the objectives clear, ambitious? What went wrong or right? Were communities participation encouraged? What could be the possible ways to include communities perceptions? This approach helps in effectiveness of the development efforts.

#### **4.5 Public Accountability of Project/NGO/Donor**

In an era of shrinking resources, greater cost effectiveness, there is a need to assess the impact of the interventions. In PIA, the conventional approaches of monitoring, review, evaluation, impact assessment are challenged. Instead of holding only beneficiaries accountable, this approach paves the way for assessing the performance of donors and implementing NGOs. This reciprocal assessments allow the donors and other 'institutionally higher' authorities to be subject to some form of accountability. This two way exchange establishes relationship between providers of financial resources and the recipients of the resources and benefits.

#### **4.6 Sustainability**

Impact assessment helps in ensuring the sustainability of the programmes and projects, sustainability implies withdrawal strategies on the part of supporting agencies and this can be achieved if some understanding of social development has taken place among all the stakeholder groups and durability is ensured.

### **5.0 Key Issues and Challenges**

#### **5.1 Power and Powerlessness**

Since PIA, involves different stakeholders from powerful donors and NGOs to less powerful communities, the question of control and ownership becomes crucial. Since the process involves different perspectives and views, the chances of taking over the process by powerful groups cannot be denied. The choice of indicators, the choice of other parameters to assess the success, despite being participatory reflect in most cases the views of donors and NGOs. Great deal of transparency is required in determining the criteria for assuring the success of interventions.

#### **5.2 Methodological Issues**

The issue of relying on qualitative data to assess impacts reflect subjective interpretation which is context specific and locally relevant. There is growing debate on qualitative and quantitative data and the scientific rigour.

#### **5.3 Time Consuming Process**

Since this process encompasses stakeholders, including beneficiaries, the time investment is more. Moreover, the communities are more concerned with the benefits than identifying indicators to measure the impact. Since the methodologies used take time, the community members are often not interested in sparing time which earns them wages. Moreover comprehension of indicators by the community and their importance is a difficult process.

## 5.4 Weak M and E systems and documentation

The process gets compounded in absence of base line. How one can measure the change when the relevant information before the interventions does not exist. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluations are considered preceding steps for participatory impact assessment process. Most of the times, the systems are either not built or even if they exist, they are not necessarily participatory. Either the donors or NGO themselves or with the help of consulting organisations make the log frames with pre-determined indicators, which fail to be participatory in approach. Since in impact assessment, focus is on M and E and the process, the documentation and reporting systems adopted do not clearly reflect the changes and transformation. The information which is very vital for impact, sometimes do not get recorded even in highly sophisticated M and E systems. On the other hand, sometimes the information is so much that it becomes difficult to use the bulk to assess impact. Minimum but effective may should brusque but is relevant in this kind of assessment.

## 5.5 Institutionalisation of Participation

Another major issue is the institutionalisation of participatory impact assessment process. Many a times participatory processes remain a necessity than a need. A key question is that whether such initiatives can be sustained for a longer period. Will the NGOs, donors and the communities carry this later as well when the projects end. This is also related to capacity building issue. If the stakeholders are engaged in an educational process building their capacities, the chances of communities and other stakeholders commitment to self-monitor, evaluate and assess the development intervention is higher.

Another related challenge is about the institutionalisation of participation in organisations. Many a times emphasis is laid on the participatory approaches to the projects and programmes while the institutions remain top down.

In many cases, separate monitoring and evaluation departments are created to take up M. E and IA, which function independent of the project teams, thus building a gap between knowing and doing. In such situations, the implementors of the projects are not involved in monitoring, evaluations and impact assessment process.

## 6.0 Conclusions

The impact assessment despite having challenges in applications is an important intervention which should be included in the project management systems. This approach helps in building relationships with donors, NGOs and communities and enables in developing improved process for participation of communities in assessing impact of development interventions on their lives.

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