

CHAPTER 13

Expanding Views about Collaborative Monitoring

Irene Guijt

MONITORING HAS, TO DATE, BEEN SEEN quite narrowly by those working in natural resource initiatives for sustainability. Development project managers mainly consider monitoring a tool for controlling proper use of money and determining whether work is progressing as planned (Roche 1999; Woodhill 2004). Researchers generally view it as a data collection process, although some are stretching its use to include a more analytical dimension and viewing resource management (and related policy processes) as ongoing experiments (Lee 1993; Bosch et al. 1996; Probst 2002). Evaluation specialists in ex ante environmental and social impact assessment are required to develop monitoring plans (IAIA 2003), but often the quality is poor, emphasis is on compliance monitoring, and monitoring for learning falls outside assessment practice. In all cases, monitoring has been seen as a fairly mechanistic exercise comprising little more than indicator selection and data collection.

This volume on monitoring for adaptive collaborative management (ACM) fundamentally challenges that perspective and offers a new perspective. It considers monitoring a process of socially negotiated learning. The contributors stress the need to negotiate core definitions and methodologies for monitoring, as well as new understandings about resource management that emerge from joint information analysis. This expanded view of monitoring allows it to become a more versatile concept that better reflects on-the-ground realities. Indicators make way for questions and issues, data collection makes way for forums and debates, and single definitions make way for shared understandings. The experiences in this volume contribute to the ongoing discussion about making science truly collaborative and serving those on the margins (Rocheleau 2003; Leach et al. 2005; Buhler et al. 2002).

The existing literature has tended to consider learning an inevitable by-product of a data-focused monitoring system. This book shows that learning does not happen through imposed concepts and methods; they do not capture the interest

of those involved and are quickly abandoned. Instead, a monitoring program that seeks to institutionalize learning among local stakeholders must be based on clarity of choices and realistic expectations.

Amid the diversity illustrated by the case studies, patterns of inspiring ideas and cautionary signs can be discerned. This chapter summarizes the lessons from monitoring practice and, in so doing, offers ideas that can help those embarking on or already involved in monitoring initiatives. First, it summarizes the benefits that are emerging from the experiences in this book, offering a grounded set of expectations instead of the commonplace generic hopes. It then identifies the main obstacles and questions that the contributors have had to deal with during design and implementation. Conceptual and methodological issues are found to need more explicit attention, particularly in the startup phase, and a good understanding of stakeholders and their processes is important. The final set of lessons concerns capacity building and phasing out external facilitation. The chapter ends by reflecting on when monitoring can add value to resource management and the criteria that can be used to recognize monitoring that triggers learning in that context.

Appreciating the Benefits

The frank accounts in this volume provide a refreshing view on monitoring. They describe the sometimes considerable difficulties encountered in creating sustained monitoring. One lesson is that capacity building requires time and resources on all sides—it does, after all, concern a relatively novel process of systematic and focused tracking of resource issues by local groups. But collaborative monitoring is not only about laborious efforts, doubts, and dilemmas.

Each experience also shows that monitoring can provide benefits—and that these are more diverse than are usually assumed (Table 13-1). The benefits may not emerge in all cases, nor are they needed in all situations. Furthermore, the chapters do not establish unequivocally that these effects are sustained. Table 13-1 lists only those benefits that are evident from these experiences; others may emerge in different contexts and applications. Furthermore, many of these monitoring experiences are in their initial stages, and additional benefits may ensue later.

In almost all cases described in this book, working together on a monitoring initiative has helped those involved understand more about institutional, environmental, and resource problems. For example, in Zimbabwe (Chapter 6), information on the volume and quality of broom grass led to the identification of limits on its use. In Malawi (Chapter 10), Kamoto writes, “The clear benefits accruing from this nontimber forest product [beekeeping] stimulated a wider community interest and willingness to learn about the resource base.”

This relates to the expectation that collaborative monitoring can improve mutual understanding of forest management visions and options. In Nepal (Chapter 4), a simple exchange of views on the indicator “improved forest condition” showed that a farmer defined it as “good ground cover with grass,” while the forest guard defined it as “forest cover where we can’t see people moving inside the forest.” Articulating such differences forms the basis for constructing new shared visions. Mutimukuru’s

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experience in Zimbabwe (Chapter 11) led to a new understanding of the role of the forest guard, and in Malawi (Chapter 10), goals for sustainable beekeeping could be set for the forest reserve. As stakeholders constructed their monitoring plans and shared their ideas about what forests meant, where problems occurred, and what might be needed, greater collective clarity appeared to emerge.

Joint monitoring has also enabled more effective decision making about forest management—either more informed decision making, as in Zimbabwe and Malawi (Chapters 6 and 10), or more equitable decision making, as in Nepal and Cameroon (Chapters 8 and 9). This is the basis for reducing conflicts over resources. Cronkleton explains that the choice to focus on monitoring the distribution of benefits was made because of the potential for conflicts, given the limited understanding by community members about the decisions and distribution process.

Critical for adaptive management of forest resources is the ability to look at one's resource base with fresh eyes. Colfer (2005a) discusses the importance of

Table 13.1. Reported Local Benefits of Collaborative Monitoring

<i>Type of benefit</i>	<i>Source (chapter in this volume)</i>
Improved understanding of institutional, environmental, and resource problems	Pokorny et al. (2); Santos et al. (3); Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Hartanto (7); Oyono et al. (9); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11); Kusumanto (12)
Mutual understanding of forest management visions and options	Pokorny et al. (2); Santos et al. (3); Paudel and Ojha (4); Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Hartanto (7); McDougall et al. (8); Oyono et al. (9); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11)
More informed and/or equitable decision making about forest management	Paudel and Ojha (4); Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Hartanto (7); McDougall et al. (8); Oyono et al. (9); Kamoto (10); Kusumanto (12)
Increased capacity and willingness to question previously accepted norms (institutionally and technically)	Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); McDougall et al. (8); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11); Kusumanto (12)
Resolution or management of conflicts	Paudel and Ojha (4); Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Oyono et al. (9); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11)
Shift in perception from monitoring as policing to monitoring as local benefit	Santos et al. (3); Paudel and Ojha (4); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11); Kusumanto (12)
Higher quality of social and organizational interactions (social capital), communication, and (inter)group skills	Pokorny et al. (2); Santos et al. (3); Paudel and Ojha (4); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Hartanto (7); McDougall et al. (8); Oyono et al. (9); Kamoto (10); Mutimukuru et al. (11); Kusumanto (12)
Increased equity in who is heard and who benefits	Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); McDougall et al. (8); Kamoto (10)
More sustainable forest management practices, fewer harmful forest resource practices	Santos et al. (3); Cronkleton et al. (5); Nyirenda and Kozanayi (6); Hartanto (7); McDougall et al. (8); Kamoto (10)

allowing surprise to guide resource management. But being open to surprise requires being willing to question institutional and technical norms. Take the case of Zimbabwe (Chapter 11), where much time was spent creating new terms of reference that defined roles and responsibilities for all resource users and managers. Letting go of old ways of seeing resources use and management also extends to the notion of monitoring itself. In several examples, forest users and government forest guards had to become accustomed to the idea that monitoring was no longer about policing but now meant collective guardianship.

Such adjustments can help improve social and organizational interactions. In Zimbabwe (Chapter 6), tension between the resource management committee and the broom grass group dropped, as did tension among grass harvesters arising from previously unfair access to grass spots. One example of improved local forest governance comes from Nepal (Chapter 8), where the forest user group committee's meetings were not open to general members, and few people knew about its decisions. Now input is actively sought and provided through shared agenda-setting processes—and decisions are fed back to the hamlet level. The villagers in Jambi, Indonesia (Chapter 12), found themselves on a steep learning curve as they set out to ensure fair election processes. The construction of a representative election committee enabled community-wide dissemination of information, and villagers actively engaged in both formal and informal meetings.

Finally, of course, successful forest use means that harmful resource practices are reduced and benefits are shared equitably. Kamoto's account from Malawi (Chapter 10) focuses on how indicators gave the community forest patrols a list of things to look for during their rounds and helped provide information that was subsequently used to reduce theft from beehives. In the Philippines (Chapter 7), Hartanto tells us how recording illegal activities helped cooperative members realize that they did not know how to report such incidents to authorities in ways that would elicit a quick response—and they set about filling this gap.

The articles collectively suggest that collaborative monitoring represents a process that can help institutionalize new norms for resource use. These norms include making equity a reality, dealing with (rather than avoiding) conflicts, and shifting entrenched and erroneous perspectives on what is “good” forest practice. There is indeed much to value in collaborative monitoring—it is not wishful thinking.

However, collaborative monitoring can entail considerable changes in the status quo and thus some (tacit) agreement on the desirability of new norms is required among the main stakeholders. Without this initial agreement, the subsequent change process may well pose insurmountable challenges for any facilitators. Therefore, a good dose of realism is also required—as borne out by all the experiences. The remainder of this chapter discusses some of the most critical considerations for collaborative monitoring to be effective.

Clarifying Concepts and Process

This book has repeatedly referred to ideas that some may consider vague—learning (and social learning, at that), collective analysis, critical reflection, participatory

action research, and so forth. Certain other terms repeated through the book are often associated with rigidity—monitoring, criteria and indicators framework, and objective hierarchies. For many engaged in local forest management, such concepts and processes can reek of past problems or may be entirely unfamiliar. Complete clarity on everything is not possible; heed the warning that the person who insists on seeing with perfect clearness before deciding never decides. Nevertheless, seeking clarity on purpose and concepts can avoid problems. Clarity is also needed about the starting point of discussion, whether it is an existing forest management plan (even one of poor quality), a research question, or a policy gap. Finally, conscious decisions are needed about how to update the monitoring processes so as to build in the learning cycle.

Being Clear about Purpose

The importance of purpose has been discussed but cannot be emphasized enough. As a Zen saying goes, “clarity of purpose, clarity of understanding.” Once it is clear what is needed, then the basis for subsequent decisions becomes clear. Chapter 1 gives a range of possible purposes that can drive a collaborative monitoring system.

Ensuring accountability for funding agencies and learning for improvement are perhaps the most common purposes. Monitoring is also essential for those who advocate sustainable forest management practices: tracking nontimber forest product harvesting may help show what volume can be extracted without adverse consequences, and tracking fires and other resource damage can trigger corrective action. Monitoring to ensure legal compliance and private sector voluntary commitments (Global Forest Watch n.d.) is one concrete example of advocacy-oriented monitoring that is currently receiving considerable attention.

Initiatives that take a monolithic approach to collaborative monitoring by squeezing all information needs and analysis into a uniform system cannot accommodate a diversity of learning strategies. Early on in designing a collaborative monitoring initiative, stakeholders need to clarify the main purpose and determine whether multiple purposes need to be met (Table 13-2). If stakeholder composition changes, the purpose may need to be revisited so that all those involved share the monitoring aims.

The purpose strongly shapes implementation, affecting the time frame and the extent and nature of stakeholder participation. Being clear about purpose helps make the monitoring operational, since those involved can then determine the time frame and how it links to decision making, their participation, and the depth of analysis and rigor required (Guijt forthcoming). It also gives stakeholders the flexibility to develop separate and complementary monitoring processes to fulfill different purposes; for example, one group can focus on local decision making while others address the information needs of external stakeholders.

Time frame. Should efforts be invested in establishing long-term monitoring mechanisms, or is short-term tracking sufficient? A short time frame may be adequate for gathering information about a known phenomenon to present to a particular group (purpose 7, Table 13-2). However, longer-term monitoring

Table 13.2. Differentiating Monitoring Types According to Purpose

<i>Monitoring as process of...</i>	<i>Core purpose</i>	<i>Example</i>
1. Financial accountability	Maintain funding	Standard reporting of expenditures, activities, and outcomes (possibly impacts) effects
2. Strategic reflection	Examine strategy and test underlying assumptions	Tracking changes in livelihood levels among case study families to assess validity of assumption that ACM leads to sustainable livelihoods
3. Capacity strengthening	Improve individual or organizational performance	Reviewing colleagues' and own performance to improve implementation process
4. Tracking context	Keep up-to-date on context of implementation	Reporting on state of the environment
5. Research	Examine uncertainties and formulate new questions	Using indicators to monitor and improve agroforestry systems through participatory research with farmers
6. Ensuring transparency and trust	Maintain transparency in use of resources	Reporting by forest users on who has harvested what, where, when, and how
7. Building critical mass of support for concern or experience	Sensitize wider social group to gain support for joint action	Tracking selected families (by themselves) for phosphorescence-tinted pesticides to gain awareness of need for collective action to seek alternatives (Stephen Sherwood.)
8. Public policy advocacy	Push for policy change	Tracking infringements of forestry laws or forestry concession plans to argue for public policy change

Source: Guijt, forthcoming.

mechanisms are needed for ongoing state-of-the-environment reporting (purpose 4). Ensuring that these correspond with local rhythms is important. Santos and her colleagues in Brazil (Chapter 3) noted the slow and fragmented rhythm of monitoring efforts that resulted from existing community decision-making processes.

Link to decision making. Who needs the information, who analyzes it, and which decision-making processes will the findings influence? If monitoring is to inform decisions, the decision makers' priorities, processes, and schedules are paramount. Take the case of purpose 6 (Table 13–2)—monitoring for transparency and as the basis for trust, of which the Bolivia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe cases are good examples (Chapters 5, 6, and 10). The information that is collected and analyzed must be relevant for the group that handles transgressions. This contrasts with purpose 2—strategic reflection—which must involve several stakeholder groups, each with its own processes and calendar of activities. Joint

monitoring requires more inclusion and, above all, clarity about how the final decisions will be made.

Degree of participation of stakeholders. Who must be involved? What can be gained by including different groups—local ownership through joint analysis, agreement on visions for a forest, acceptance of decisions made, or something else? What should each group’s role be? Regular strategic reflections probably require more widespread participation than state-of-the-environment reporting, which is often the province of trained scientists (purpose 4, Table 13–2); although community monitoring that feeds scientific reporting is increasingly common.

Degree of rigor. Several contributors commented on the unnecessary detail imposed by the criteria and indicators framework (Chapters 2, 3, and 7). Seeking comprehensiveness to ensure sufficient rigor can lead to stagnation or abandonment of efforts. But then, what is sufficient rigor—whose standards count? Mobilizing people (purpose 7, Table 13–2) may require less scientifically rigorous data than research (purpose 5), but auditing (purpose 1) must comply with certain standards of rigor. The rigor question requires distinguishing between data that one would like to know and those that one *needs* to know.

Agreeing on Core Concepts

“The chief virtue that language can have is clearness,” Hippocrates said, “and nothing detracts from it so much as the use of unfamiliar words.” The core concepts of collaborative monitoring—participation, social learning, monitoring, communication, critical reflection—are ambiguous terms that are often used in differing and normative ways. Different stakeholders may well hold different views on what participation means in practice or how to balance reflection with data collection. Discussions about these core concepts are important to build a shared understanding or at least identify where differences may lie.

Early in an ACM process, terms like *monitoring*, *indicator*, and *learning* need explicit discussion. Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) found much confusion about *indicator*, as did Santos and her colleagues in Brazil (Chapter 3). Chapter 11 describes how forest guards and villagers jointly redefined the notion of monitoring early in their process, since the existing understanding of monitoring as a policing function was inhibiting the potential for learning. Discussions in Zimbabwe gave Mutimukuru and her colleagues an opportunity to reflect with resource users on their monitoring system and also the importance of collaborative monitoring for adding value.

Particularly important is clarity about *learning*. ACM initiatives seek information-driven adaptation as a continual self-correcting and improving process. This is a very different kind of learning—more dynamic, reflective and experience-based—than taking courses or obtaining information. Several chapters in this volume make it clear that data collection alone does not lead to learning (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 10); it is the insertion of data into discussions and decision making that leads to action-oriented improvements

Knowing Where to Start

So what forms the starting point for discussions on monitoring? Is it the existing local forestry arrangement or an external plan of action for the forest area or the research question? If monitoring is to improve financial accountability, strategic reflection, and capacity strengthening (Table 13-2), then the most logical starting point is the forest management plan. This might be a funding proposal with a hierarchy of objectives or an agreed upon joint management plan. Such plans can be a useful basis for comparing planned with actual performance.

Together with the stakeholders, one can assess whether a clear and accepted forest management plan exists on which to base the monitoring system. If not, before the monitoring process can be designed, time must be spent formulating a plan or rewriting unclear goals, objectives, and assumptions. Kamoto describes how in Chimaliro, the forest management plan written by foresters had no local ownership and was not being used to guide improvements. She undertook a more participatory planning exercise that became the basis of subsequent monitoring work (Chapter 10).

Planning is commonly separated from monitoring, but they are part and parcel of the same process. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) included identification of priority issues and planning as essential parts of an integrated learning process on forest management. This was echoed in Brazil (Chapters 2 and 3). And Hartanto's experience in the Philippines (Chapter 7) involved identifying priority areas for developing and improving plans.

Other purposes call for different starting points. For example, if tracking (purpose 4, Table 13-2) is needed, the monitoring work will focus on developing a process for a core set of environmental indicators, such as for the state-of-the-environment reports produced by some countries. If monitoring is for research (purpose 5), then the starting point will be the variables relating to the research question. If monitoring is to be used for public policy advocacy (purpose 8), then the starting point will be problematic policies that can be critiqued by using monitoring data or policy improvements that need to be supported with monitoring data.

Completing the Learning Cycle

“He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.” Confucius articulates what the ACM work is all about—learning as a necessary process if forests are to survive and forest communities are to have dignified livelihoods and well-being.

This book is replete with discussions on the importance of linking information and analysis. In Chapter 1, Figure 1-2 shows that monitoring data must be accompanied by reflection to lead to application of lessons and insights. Building the full learning cycle into the process takes monitoring beyond simple reporting (Figure 13-1). ACM initiatives must demonstrate what happened, the quality of the monitoring, and the immediate results. Learning that leads to action must involve analyzing why changes occurred and what the next steps might be (Figure 13-1). As

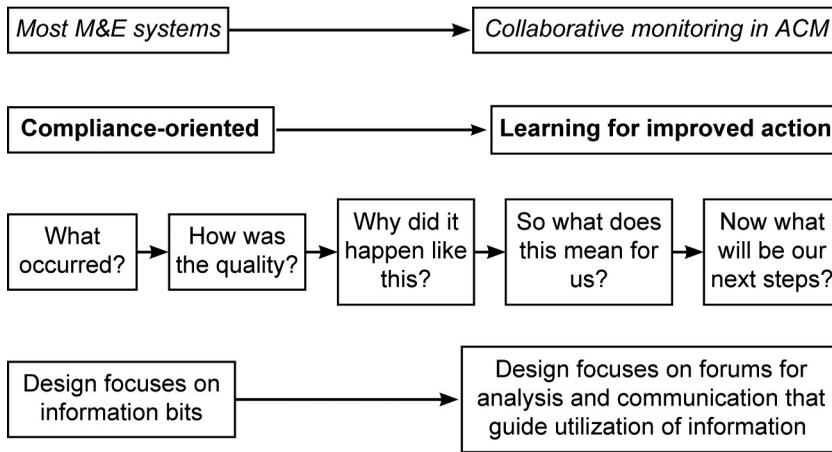


Figure 13-1. *Moving from Compliance to Learning in Monitoring*

Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) concluded, “Monitoring remained at the center, not as a rigid and hierarchical framework of indicators, but as a dynamic link between learning and planning.”

Kamoto’s example (Chapter 10) of the evolution of monitoring in the Chimaliro forest is rich in detail. She recounts how the patrols took place (what happened) but that the patrols hesitated to point fingers at culprits (quality of monitoring), so honey thefts continued (immediate result). Reflections by the coordinating committee about the problem and what needed changing led to new steps that ensured that sanctions were imposed, and honey thefts decreased. In Bolivia and Nepal (Chapters 5 and 8) the difference made by critical reflection is equally evident. And Kusumanto (Chapter 12) illustrates how repeated cycles of critical reflection on political processes allowed more complex questions about accountability to emerge. A critical component in all cases was joint analysis of the information and debate in accepted forums with decision-making power.

Considering Information Quality

Notwithstanding the centrality of learning, the quality of data must not suffer. As Ottke et al. (2000, 1) say, “We emphasise communication skills because the best data in the world is useless if it lies fallow. But credible data is also critical to convince skeptics and engender trust.”

Solid information is critical—without credibility, evidence that has been gathered will not influence any decision maker. However, often a disproportionate amount of time is invested in trying to reach agreement about “the “best” indicators, at the expense of developing discussion and decision-making forums where information is analyzed and communicated and the learning cycle can come full circle.

The examples in this book suggest that ensuring that the required information is good enough (rather than perfect) is as important as making sure that the

discussion and decision-making forums are appropriate and effective. Information and analysis must be in balance.

The experiences show that both qualitative and quantitative information is useful. The choice depends on the question being asked and the user of the information. In Dimako, Cameroon (Chapter 9), the monitoring of land transfers to two villages focused mainly on process issues, such as how the council was returning the reallocated agricultural land and how the two villages were sharing it. But they needed quantitative data in the form of social and agroecological maps for verification. In Nepal (Chapter 8), heterogeneity analysis helped the forest user group to “track and assess who was participating, contributing, and benefiting . . . and trends in participation, contributions, and benefits for marginalized versus non-marginalized members proved critical . . .” Thus quantitative data enabled both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of equity.

Many monitoring information systems fail because they cannot explain why something is occurring. A useful distinction can be made between contextual and noncontextual methods of data collection (Booth et al. 1998, cited in McGee 2004): “methods which are contextual . . . are those that attempt to capture a social phenomenon within its social, economic and cultural context . . . On the other hand, any large-scale household survey . . . will lie at the non-contextual end of this spectrum.” One must decide whether contextual insights are needed to explain forest quality or use, and that may determine what kind of information is needed.

Information needs inevitably change over time—many indicators selected in the beginning may lose significance as participants become more adept at identifying what information is relevant for their resource management activities. Kusumanto (Chapter 12) describes how citizens’ increasingly complex questions during the preelection process inspired them to seek out different types of information. But not all information needs have a short shelf life. Some data remain important, such as the use of specific forest resources. Most monitoring efforts therefore consist of a mix of long-term fixed indicators and a set of shifting information needs.

Understanding Stakeholders and Their Processes

It requires considerable political astuteness to navigate the human relationships within a forest area. The contributors have highlighted four important considerations. First is getting agreement on how inclusive to make the monitoring design and implementation. A second consideration relates to the forums that are needed for sharing, debating, and decision making. A third aspect is choosing an organizational affiliation and entry point for the work. A final consideration relates to the transaction costs for stakeholders in any participatory process, including collaborative monitoring.

Agreeing on Roles and Extent of Participation

Critical to all the experiences is the decision about how inclusive to make the monitoring process. This decision is needed prior to designing the process (who

should help construct it?) but also in implementing it (who is needed to make it work?). Opening participation to all possible stakeholder groups may be desirable to engender shared ownership, but as Santos and her colleagues discovered in Brazil (Chapter 3), the range of perspectives may be too divergent to allow for convergence around a common monitoring agreement. Accordingly, they decided to focus initially on the stakeholder group of central importance, the rubber tappers who were the main target group for the new benefit-sharing forestry practice. In the Philippines (Chapter 7), all stakeholders negotiated a shared monitoring framework and then allocated responsibilities based on formal mandate and interest. Kusumanto (Chapter 12) discusses how critical it was for the facilitators to adopt a socially inclusive approach to monitoring the preelection process in Jambi, since norms of fairness needed to shift across all stakeholder groups.

Deciding which stakeholder groups to include and what is expected of each group requires careful thought. The desire for local ownership must be balanced with considerations of whether stakeholders have the capacity to contribute in a meaningful manner and are willing to be involved. In Zimbabwe (Chapter 11), the terms of reference for the monitoring initiative included specifics on how the monitoring subcommittees should link with other stakeholders and organize forums for stakeholders to analyze the information. As a result, the roles of all other stakeholder groups were also clarified.

Roles need regular redefinition. As an ACM initiative shifts and capacities grow, new configurations of stakeholders may become feasible. Particular care must be taken to avoid token participation, which can turn the good intentions of learning and improvement into a technical exercise in data collection. In Nepal (Chapter 8), the forest user group shifted from a passive group dominated by the chairperson to an active committee driven by a self-monitoring process with a renewed constitution and operational plans; the change occurred because their participation ceased to be token.

Selecting Forums

Monitoring processes include identifying where information is to be shared and analyzed. Possibilities include general community meetings (Chapter 11), special forestry management group meetings (Chapter 8), and specific resource use committee meetings (Chapter 6). As mentioned in Chapter 1, such forums or spaces can be closed, invited, or created (Cornwall 2002). “Spaces,” as used here, comprise those “opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests . . . Power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests” (Gaventa 2006, 5–6).

In closed spaces, the decision-making group excludes others. Such spaces, typically composed of elected representatives, may be effective but are often places where decisions are made by a select few. In Nepal (Chapter 8), for example, “annual plans and activities were generally made and carried out at the discretion of the chairperson of the executive committee.” Decisions made within such “closed spaces” should

follow wider consultation and then be shared. Sometimes, however, closed spaces can be very useful and need to be created. In Malawi (Chapter 10), a coordinating committee was formed to oversee issues from three forest areas. This committee consisted of representatives from the three areas, and its decisions—behind closed doors—circumvented reluctance to arrest honey thieves.

Created spaces can be the domain of those who are commonly marginalized. Although such spaces can allow for discussions and decisions on people's own terms (and not on the authorities' terms), they can also suffer from prejudices and biases related to gender, age, poverty, ethnicity, or caste. McDougall and her colleagues (Chapter 8) give a poignant example of a community-based forest user group whose decision making and benefit sharing were dominated by the local elite while low-income and low-caste people and women were marginalized. Their ACM efforts included changing the decision-making and planning processes to ensure greater opportunity for marginalized group members.

Sometimes an existing social or administrative unit can become a created space, offering opportunities for learning that do not exist elsewhere. Both experiences from Nepal (Chapters 4 and 8) explain how shifting the attention from the village level to the hamlet level allowed more forest users to share information and reflect critically on progress. At other times, resource management committees that mix marginalized groups with other groups are formed for specific purposes and take on crucial roles. In Cameroon (Chapter 9), for example, an ad hoc committee of local and external representatives was created to follow up initial ACM work and became an important space for creating and implementing mechanisms for sustaining change.

Between the closed-door forums and the open-access opportunities are the "invited" spaces (Cornwall 2002), whose benefits for marginalized stakeholders can be difficult to assess. Hartanto (Chapter 7) describes an interesting case in which a monitoring effort was undertaken by different stakeholders who agreed to work as genuine equals, but ultimately preexisting power differences prevailed. In her conclusion, she notes that the powerful state players had helped design the monitoring process but were then hesitant to support the local organization; "a jointly developed framework does not necessarily mean shared responsibility for undertaking the work involved." The local government agency had a plan that would force all local organizations to carry out a different environmental performance monitoring system, which would discourage local monitoring and related ACM efforts. Thus Hartanto observes that more powerful stakeholders need to provide a genuine opportunity for collaborative monitoring to be based on learning and not policing. Such opportunities need to be constructed—they are rarely given freely.

Finding the Entry Point

A thoughtful entry strategy includes consideration of the organizational affiliation of the facilitators, the local power dynamics between organizations involved in the resource management, and the level where monitoring needs to be set up and sustained.

For facilitators, alliance with a local organization may smooth the entry. Santos (Chapter 3) facilitated a process in Brazil while she was the staff member of an organization not involved in the local community. This neutrality gave her credibility and trust. When she later joined the staff of an NGO with a stake in the outcomes, her neutrality was called into question (but eventually confirmed). If her initial entry had been through this group, she might not have won the community's trust.

The lesson of Mutimukuru and her colleagues (Chapter 11) is powerful. Before initiating their collaborative monitoring process, they spent considerable time thinking about the best entry point. The context studies they undertook gave them insights into local power dynamics and helped them select the Forestry Commission as the best option because of the support it could offer. Sometimes, a neutral entry point is best. Oyono and his colleagues (Chapter 9) describe how the ACM team in Cameroon convened a meeting of different stakeholders and maintained an unaligned position to ensure fairness and facilitate access to all the parties involved in a land conflict.

Getting a feel for the organizational and social landscape takes time and political perceptiveness. Monitoring can get off to a wrong start if the facilitators are unclear about where to focus their efforts. Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) began by looking to the formal forest user group as the vehicle for monitoring ACM but quickly stepped back and found more suitable social processes and structures. They worked on strengthening the village level as the backbone of the monitoring process, as did McDougall and her colleagues (Chapter 8).

Recognizing Transaction Costs

Participation is not free. Forest guards, facilitators, and researchers are paid to undertake monitoring work, but for others—usually the forest users—time spent in meetings and debates means less time earning an income. The transaction costs for local people and organizations are considerable (Table 13–3). Yet they are rarely funded.

Table 13.3. Transaction Costs for Collaborative Monitoring

<i>Time spent in collaborative monitoring</i>	<i>Costs</i>
Interacting in interviews, focus groups, committee meetings, workshops, seminars, community meetings	Time for other activities, which may be productive, reproductive, developmental, political
Analyzing data, opinions, problems during mapping, transect walks, computerized data analysis	Cash outlays for collective activities, such as joint meals, food, transportation, accommodation
Sharing information through theater, dance, storytelling, video and radio productions	Social position in relation to nonparticipating friends, peers, rivals
Traveling to and from meetings, data collection sites	Satisfaction with home, employment situation, lifestyle
Waiting for local participants, outsiders, decisions, funds	

Source: adapted from Jackson 2000.

Being realistic about these costs and weighing them against the potential benefits (Table 13–1) can help all stakeholders be realistic in their expectations. In the case of Pokorny and his colleagues (Chapter 2), the scientists were the main beneficiaries of monitoring efforts. Yet most of the unpaid costs were borne by local community members. In Bolivia (Chapter 5), on the other hand, the ACM initiative, including the collaborative monitoring, clearly benefited the local people. The ACM team had understood that this was critically important and therefore built the monitoring process around timber sales and showed how it could provide concrete benefits.

The considerable transaction costs for community members may not be the only cause of low participation in collaborative monitoring—concerns about the ACM work itself may cause people to consider the monitoring wasted effort. Santos and her colleagues (Chapter 3) started with 13 families, 3 of which left the program after one year, unconvinced that it benefited them. Conversely, if monitoring shows longer-term benefits, participation in ACM may increase. In the Nepal example (Chapter 8), Ms. B was immediately rewarded for holding the committee accountable to its principles. Making the benefits of the monitoring process public is critical to ACM initiatives. Monitoring can play an important role in sustaining interest in ACM by showing the extent of its impact on forests and people's well-being.

Keeping an Eye on Capacity and Change

Collaborative monitoring engages stakeholders in a range of unfamiliar activities whose initial benefits may not be apparent. Learning how to construct a constitution for forest committees, monitoring the monitoring process, and learning to work with other stakeholders for the first time—all these activities require serious investment in capacity building if collaborative monitoring is to be effective and sustained. It is important to identify who needs which capacities, create a strategy for sustaining the capacity-building process, and consciously phase out external facilitation.

Identifying Necessary Capacities

In ACM, multiple capacities are needed for effective collaborative monitoring. Most obvious is methodological capacity and understanding of monitoring mechanisms that go beyond policing. Monitoring-as-learning, critical reflection, and the cyclical nature of reflect-act (Figure 3, Chapter 1) are particularly important topics that require specific attitudes and skills.

But these are certainly not the only capacities needed. Many natural resource management initiatives have a fairly project-centric perception of participation. ACM-focused initiatives, notwithstanding their collaborative intentions, are no exception. Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) describe the problems that occurred when a project-centric and indicator-focused perspective guided the development of a monitoring process, initially blinding them to other institutionalized practices

that prohibited learning. Their methodological understanding of indicators could not help them deal with poor representation of stakeholders in decision-making bodies and limited understanding of the rights and responsibilities of devolved forest management. But when they recognized the political and analytical dimensions of monitoring, they were able to reorient their work effectively.

Such “sociopolitical” capacities, though rarely acknowledged as significant for monitoring, are required. They are needed not just by the facilitator—they make it possible for diverse and even opposed stakeholders to conduct analysis, and they enable marginalized groups to speak in decision-making forums. Kusumanto (Chapter 12) describes how people’s initial hesitance to learn about political processes shifted once they started understanding those processes and how they could influence them. This made it possible for them to ask more challenging questions about transparency and accountability that they first did not dare to consider.

Building capacity requires identifying which stakeholder group requires what abilities and at what level. Capacity may be needed at the community level or at district or even national levels—depending on where the decision-making forums are and where the analysis of monitoring data takes place. And it may be the facilitators themselves whose capacity needs building. Many of the contributors reflect on their own learning, pointing out assumptions that were challenged as the processes took shape. For example, Paudel and Ojha (Chapter 4) saw the limitations of their focus on indicators, and Pokorny and his colleagues (Chapter 2) realized the rigidity of the criteria and indicators framework.

Ensuring Continuity and Focus

External facilitators often have methodological capacities for monitoring. But local actors may well have a better sense of how to transform information into socially acceptable action. Both types of skills are necessary and may need enhancing. Social and political insights can be gained through context studies (Chapters 3 and 11), for example, and the methodological capacities of local organizations and communities can be developed in training programs. Investment in capacity-building efforts to maintain effective monitoring should focus on the actors who will carry the process in the long term.

The existing capacities, whether methodological or sociopolitical, determine what is possible to achieve in the short term. Monitoring capacities take time to build, and expecting too much too soon inevitably leads to frustrations and depresses motivation. The work in Bolivia (Chapter 5) offers a clear example of an effective strategy, starting slow and small: a simple plan to pay wages to project workers was adapted, without facilitators’ assistance, to manage a new project. Several authors note that once a focused monitoring process had become established, spontaneous use of the idea occurred elsewhere (Chapters 4, 6, 7, and 10).

How capacities are built depends on the starting level, the resources available, and the type of capacity in question. Many experiences in this volume have built capacities on the job, using concrete experiences to generate understanding. In some cases, certain individuals or groups received additional training to undertake specific tasks, such as indicator identification or data analysis.

Revising and Modifying Continually

“The wise adapt themselves to circumstances,” goes a Chinese proverb, “as water molds itself to the pitcher.” ACM stands for adaptive collaborative *management* but could just as well signify adaptive collaborative *monitoring*. Monitoring systems need continual change. As monitoring mechanisms are implemented and capacities are developed, the difference between what is desirable and what is feasible becomes clear and adjustments can be made.

Initial agreements about stakeholders’ roles, types of information, and monitoring methods and timing all require regular reviewing to ensure they are still relevant and achievable. Santos and her colleagues (Chapter 3) in the eastern Amazon started with many stakeholders, but after finding the group too unwieldy, they worked with just the rubber tappers. Now it might be possible to open their monitoring process to include other significant stakeholders. Mutimukuru and her colleagues (Chapter 11) give another example, illustrating how terms of reference drafted by stakeholders’ representatives were then finalized in a larger gathering. These terms of reference will probably need revision now that implementation is underway.

The design of the monitoring process should allow for periodic review of the methodology. How often will this monitoring review happen and with whom? What questions will be asked? Box 13-1 offers some ideas.

Box 13.1. Checking the Monitoring Process

In Brazil, a three-year process for monitoring joint work in agriculture was reviewed every six months. In one of the case study sites, the team used four criteria to assess the methods and two to assess the indicators, as had been agreed in plenary sessions. If a method or an indicator no longer met the criteria, it was replaced or eliminated. During the six-month reviews, methods were adjusted and tips were exchanged about how to implement certain aspects of the monitoring process, and the importance of ensuring that the information fed into learning was stressed.

Method-related criteria:

- the level of participation of farmers in the collection, collation, and analysis of data and dissemination of findings;
- time demand (for collection, collation, analysis, and dissemination);
- the degree of difficulty of applying the method (mainly for collection and analysis); and
- the potential for others outside the current monitoring group to use the methods (for scaling up and sustainability).

Indicator-related criteria:

- reliability of the information; and
- relevance of the final information (for different audiences: farmers, farmers’ union, NGOs, funding agencies, public agencies).

Source: from Sidersky and Guijt 2000.

Phasing Out Facilitation

For learning to be sustained, it must be institutionalized, made the new norm, and embedded locally, and that requires finding a long-term home for the monitoring process. Oyono and his colleagues (Chapter 9) were conscious of the need to phase out their role as external facilitators and found a local organization that worked alongside them and was able to take over once funding for the ACM team ended. The Malawi and Zimbabwe experiences (Chapters 10 and 11) were collaborations with established local actors, in both cases the forest department officials but also local resource management committees; the ACM field teams worked closely with them to develop the monitoring systems, in ways appropriate to the two contexts.

As questioners, mediators, and technical advisers, external facilitators may initially play an important role. But an awareness of the need to phase themselves out and invest in local capacities and relationships can enhance the likelihood that a monitoring process will be sustainable.

Finding Opportunities for Collaborative Monitoring

Collaborative monitoring within the context of ACM initiatives offers many potential benefits, but these benefits are not guaranteed—they are the result of considerable work for the groups involved. The contributors suggest that collaborative monitoring can succeed under the following conducive starting conditions:

- a focused resource issue or problem around which to start;
- sufficient time to develop and implement an agreed process;
- skilled and dedicated facilitation;
- limited diversity of stakeholders (and perspectives) at the onset;
- open discussions about problems in stakeholder interactions;
- innovative solutions to organizing ACM and collaborative monitoring; and
- use of monitoring as a process of analysis and communication, not simply data collection.

The experiences suggest that less is more—at least at first. In most contexts where ACM would be useful, the issues, relationships, and information needs are sufficiently complex and dynamic that a modest start appears wise. Too many issues to monitor may initially overwhelm those responsible for implementation. Too many stakeholders and their diverse interests at the onset can have a stagnating effect. Too many monitoring purposes at once can cause confusion about priorities in data collection, information analysis, communication of findings, and stakeholders' roles.

This collection of hands-on experiences suggests how collaborative monitoring can contribute to adaptive and collaborative forest management under different contexts and conditions. It moves the discussion of adaptive natural resource management forward on two fronts.

First, it clearly shows that collaborative monitoring means more than a technocratic manipulation of indicators, objective measurements, and data hierarchies. A

mechanical approach to monitoring that focuses on data collection—as described in much of the resource monitoring literature—does not lay the basis for collective learning. Monitoring means involving diverse stakeholders and building in critical reflection. It is a social and political process that requires negotiation around information identification and analysis.

Second, by showing the great diversity of practice with varying degrees of success and limitations, the authors invite us to revisit the widely held view that collaborative monitoring is a stepwise exercise in data gathering and compilation. Such diversity cannot be standardized with a fixed set of concise steps or a routine, mechanical application of more or less participatory tools. To be effective, adaptive and collaborative monitoring will require political astuteness and a deep understanding of social learning as a collective sense-making process.

The dynamics of the political process, the social and historical patterns of communication and domination, and the nature of the forestry issues determine the extent to which alternative forest management processes can be adaptive and collaborative. Careful design can help offset these unknowns—but adaptation en route will remain essential, as it is for monitoring mechanisms and institutions.

This should not be interpreted as a call for abandoning collaborative monitoring. On the contrary, natural resource management professionals need a grounded understanding of options, outcomes, and challenges to make the most of what collaborative monitoring can offer. The experiences in this volume offer such insights. In so doing, they place monitoring solidly within the realm of social learning, inspiring and guiding those embarking on or immersed in processes of social change.