The Community Infrastructure Project (CIP) is an innovative project. It attempts to be responsive to communities' expressed desire to improve their lives through access to better infrastructure and to test the recipient's willingness to contribute substantially to the costs of providing and maintaining the facilities chosen. An important milestone in the community mobilization process is the preparation of the Community Action Plan (CAP).

Facilities provided must be based on informed choice, represent community demand and capacity to operate and maintain completed facilities, and their collective willingness to contribute financially.

How do we know if the so-called community planning process in projects does this? Project management, being isolated from actual field realities, is often unable to directly assess the quality and impact of social mobilization. There is a tendency for management to focus on the completion of pre-defined "steps" in the mobilization process and the achievement of physical targets and deadlines.

There is therefore a need for a way to assess the quality and results from the community mobilization process in a way which allows project management to make timely and appropriate decisions to improve or expand the process. Process Monitoring is one such tool.
Process Monitoring (PM) is a way to collect relevant qualitative and quantitative information about the effectiveness of key project processes as seen by the actual participants in the process. This often means community members and representatives and project field workers, actors whose voices are otherwise not often heard by project management. PM helps bridge the gap between project management's perspective and realities on the ground.

**PM Looks at Community Action Planning**

The high drop-out rate of communities identified for participating in the Project was identified as an important issue by the Project. The PM Team was asked to explore possible reasons for this and report to project management. As a critical project process, and as a main factor in ensuring the community's readiness for participating in the project, community mobilization was also examined through PM. The preparation of the CAP, an important milestone in the community mobilization process, was assessed. Field visits, participant observation, structured discussions and meetings with project management were used to gather information about the entire CAP process. The CAP is a formal document containing an agreement between the community and the Project.

**Issues Identified**

Several important issues were identified through PM through Participants Observation. Among the most important are:

**Lack of Representativeness**

The community's needs were identified using structured questionnaires administered to heads of all households (usually males) in the community. This process to a large extent excluded women (representing half of the intended beneficiaries).

In addition, the women's committee was formed as part of the men's community based organization, which conflicted with the socio-cultural norms prevailing in the Northwest Frontier Province. The Project also required female committee members to have a minimum of a high school education, which effectively excluded all but young girls. Since young girls have restricted mobility and social status, they were not effective in representing the "voice" of all the community's women.

During the technical survey work in the community, women felt excluded from decisions on the location, type, design and operation of the infrastructure to be provided. During the technical survey work in the community, women felt excluded from decisions on the location, type, design and operation of the infrastructure to be provided. Also, block representatives, who were important in collecting data about the community and its preferences, were not chosen "democratically", but were directly appointed by influential persons, known as a "contact group". They were not adequately prepared for their role in data collection and informing the community about the project, and were not motivated or able to spend the time necessary to do effective community mobilization.

**Information Overload**

Initially, the CAP was a laborious and time consuming process, focusing on data collection, and often involving poorly trained community members who were either unwilling or unable to carry out their tasks effectively.

It was also found that the project's own social organizers were overloaded with data collection and processing tasks, which occupied up to three-fourths of their time and left little time for actual work in the community.

Data collection for the Community Self-Survey (CSS) was done through structured interviews with the heads of all households in the community. Besides providing information from a mostly male group, this process resulted in large quantities of data which were processed up to three times; at household level, block level and at the project office. This cumbersome task occupied the majority of the Social Organizer's time.

The PM Team suggested rationalizing data collection and processing through using the Project's computerized MIS to store and retrieve household data.

In addition, it was found that much of the information collected was not needed at this stage of the Project, and could either be omitted or deferred to a later stage in the project. This would release the valuable time of field staff which could be better used on working directly with informing and mobilizing communities.

Thus, an unrepresentative community consultation process, often conducted by overloaded or misallocated project staff or poorly trained community members, and which did not capture the real demand of the community as a whole, resulted in both a frustrated, demotivated staff and community. This also increased the chances of lack of ownership at a later stage due to a "mismatch" between true community preferences and those identified by a community action planning process with serious shortcomings and built-in biases.
Lack of Coordination between Social & Technical Processes

PM also found that the technical survey team only started its work after the official signing of the CAP between the community and the Project. The technical survey, done by external consultants, could take up to one month, and did not adequately involve project staff or the community.

The PM Team saw that project efficiency could be improved through closer coordination between the technical survey, the CSS and the CAP process. Information generated by the CSS and the CAP could be made available to the technical survey team, who could start working earlier, before the signing of the CAP. Likewise, information generated through the technical survey could be used in the preparation of the CAP. Thus, these previously divergent processes could now mutually benefit each other.

Completing the Loop

These important issues were discussed between project management and the PM Team through a series of discussions and meetings. It was emphasized that addressing these issues in a timely and effective manner would result in a more efficient use of the Project's resources, both time, staff and costs. The relevance and importance of PM in identifying important problems and solutions which the Project could not otherwise address were beginning to be realized by project management.

Convincing Project Management

This was perhaps the hardest task of all. At the beginning, project management was not very familiar with participatory methodologies for working with communities and the role of process monitoring in improving project effectiveness. Eventually, though, project management did accept some of the recommendations of the PM Team on ways to reduce the time taken to complete the CAP and the large amount of sometimes unnecessary data collected at the initial phases of the project. Decisions were taken to at least test more participatory and consultative methods in working with communities, and for the first time women were addressed directly in the community mobilization process through preparing a separate CAP for women.

These changes resulted in an increase in the effectiveness of the CAP process, as indicated by improved staff performance and better contacts between community and Project.
The Future?

Gradually, a change in the status of PM is noticeable. Project Management has begun to realize the potential value of PM in improving the way the Project works. As a result of the clear and convincing information through PM, CIP has changed its ways of doing things in some important areas. Project management is now requesting the PM Team to look at other “problematic” areas of the Project. Initial skepticism is slowly giving way to acceptance, and, in some cases, even to appreciation. In the case of CIP, it appears that PM is playing an important role.