

CHAPTER V

Participatory Evaluations:

A Presentation Outline

Introduction

This presentation introduces the rationale for participatory evaluations and present some broad guidelines for facilitating them. The preparation of this presentation outline is based on the technical paper from Freedman (1994), and adapted where appropriate.

Participatory evaluations rely on project staff and beneficiaries as researchers instead of professional evaluators. This changes evaluations in critical ways. It recognizes that project staff and beneficiaries are the key persons of knowledge on what the program should do or not do. Further it recognizes that these persons are the most concerned stakeholders. Once these most concerned stakeholders are engaged in a project's successes and failures it is assumed that they will take responsibility for implementing changes. This is an important step towards attaining sustainable development.

Participatory evaluations do not pretend to meet the high procedural standards of conventional evaluations, but they do reflect the needs and responses of those whose lives are most directly affected by projects.

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The presentation contains ten basic concepts. The rationale for each concept is given below, while diagrams for overhead transparencies are presented in exhibit 11, figures 12 to 21. This chapter together with the diagrams are the resource material for the presentation.

This presentation material is addressed to a wide range of professionals, and beneficiaries. It describes a controversial idea whose time has come. Through participatory evaluation, health professionals including project staff will find an approach to establish contact with the community and the people who are supposed to benefit from a health program will find a way of being participant instead of recipient.

Participatory Evaluations: Ten Basic Concepts

1. Participation and development

The words participation and development became fashionable. They are again and again misused to justify funding schemes for projects.

Everyone uses them from the World Bank offices to the Filipino women in a sewing co-operative.

Participation refers to the political idea that all individuals have a voice in making decisions. It is the trademark of democracies. *Development* is the charitable mission of industrial economies to alleviate economic and social hardships abroad. Together, the phrase *participatory development* suggests that villagers in developing countries should have a say in introducing social services and getting the economy going. Quite a fundamental challenge to the institutions dedicated to building development expertise.

Next to land and industry possession of knowledge is power. Most of the villagers in developing countries lack all of them. Developing physical capital took priority over human capital, because delivering physical resources is easier than developing human resources. Besides this developing human resources is risky.

Things are changing now, not because the participatory approaches have become less risky for donor agencies, but because they work better than the conventional approaches.

2. Useful evaluations

Beneficiaries as informants: Working with beneficiaries as informants was based on two concerns: (1) to provide a mechanism by which information could flow from beneficiaries to the management, (2) to enable measurement of the project's impact. Evaluations have not to be seen as a performance review only. In the context of this paper evaluation means a collective examination of problems, aimed at problem solving, and successes, aimed at learning from them.

Donor focused evaluations: This type of evaluation conduct a performance review for managers and donor agencies. It assist donor agencies in decision taking. The donor agency takes the central position and exercise power.

Beneficiaries as researchers: Evaluations have not to be seen as a performance review only. In the context of this paper evaluation means a collective examination of problems, aimed at problem solving, and successes, aimed at learning from them.

Beneficiary focused evaluations:

In this type of evaluation the beneficiaries take the central position and are empowered. Evaluators facilitate the evaluation by offering their expertise in ways guided by the beneficiaries. This evaluation style has two aims: (1) to facilitate communication between beneficiaries, project staff and the donor agency, (2) to assist beneficiaries in finding solutions to project related problems.

3. Helping projects learn

The blue print approach: Is the management style characterized by: extensive pre-planning, ensuring the demonstration of the link between inputs and outputs, guarantee cost effective designs, and meeting the resource requirements and time frames. This style stresses accountability.

The learning process approach: Is the management style which stresses flexibility. It admits problems in delivery and timing, relies less on planning and focus on the ability of participants (key stakeholders) to adapt, respond and to learn.

Freedman (1994) reports that research conducted by David Korten, in 1980, proved that learning process approaches are more successful than the conventional blueprint approaches.

4. Expertise

The expert as teacher: In conventional evaluations the information is an end in itself. Participatory evaluation experts instead produce research competence in others as well as the ability to use and act on the results of research. The information in this case becomes less important than the process of making it possible for others to obtain it and to use it.

Facilitating group learning: The role of the specialist is to guide the participants in using techniques for gathering information and for making the pieces of information fit in a way that gives a portrait of the whole. This can be simple survey techniques, simple guides for interviews or techniques for conducting a meeting.

5. Participatory evaluation and science

Science for conventional practice:

- a) Objectivity: The contacts between researcher and respondents are free of subjective influences.
- b) Use quantitative data where possible, to social categories of persons and behavior to facilitate statistical summaries.
- c) Assure attribution by using ideal research designs, based on comparison of program groups to control groups at program and post program stages.
- d) Apply random sampling to avoid over representing any one group or any one portion of a population.

Science for participatory practice:

- a) Establish empathy, by encouraging close associations between researchers and respondents.
- b) Use numbers sparingly, by applying numerical measurement only where they are explanatory or add authority to participants messages.
- c) Make costs and benefits tangible, by adapting the design to broaden the participants' awareness.
- d) Make use of informal sampling, by keeping it simple in composition and size i.e. men, women, users and non users, rich and poor etc.

Participatory evaluations fit their methods to the people and not reverse. They turn the conventional concern with objectivity upside down. Close association based on trust between those who ask questions and

those who answer them, is more than anything, what makes the information reliable.

6. Steps in research and social action

Combining research and social action: When people know what they need they are more likely to rise the occasion to get it. With participatory evaluation they may discover a need for better technology, for more financial resources and very often social needs. Participants may discover that they fail as villagers, to act effectively on their own behalf and during the process realize how they might change to do so. In this way participatory evaluation gets linked with social action.

The idea is simple, but putting it into practice often seems awkward because it combines two quite different activities: social research and social action. This combination of efforts, obtaining data and social action, brings research into the real world. Evaluations do not begin with experts bringing in questionnaires and knowledge on survey research, nor are they over when reports are submitted.

The steps in participatory research:

- a) Creating an evaluation team.
- b) Identifying problems.
- c) Matching methods to people and problems.
- d) Putting knowledge to work.

7. Creating a team

Old or new groups: Participatory action preferably starts by building on existing affinities, based on the experience that any group has to comfort the local elite, whether groups are new ones or existing ones.

Autonomy: Local groups perform better if they are independent from authorities. The choice should be determined based on the question who will be the users and key stakeholders of the planned action research.

Group size: Starting small is having more chance for success. The larger the group the looser the commitment and the more difficult to manage.

Diversity of membership: With exception for the gender differences, all scholars argue that dramatic differences in wealth or status affect adversely participation. In participatory action research one has to choose, serving the oppressed and the oppressors at the same time is not realistic.

8. Identifying problems

Eliciting questions: Participatory evaluations begin with scenarios like this one, spontaneous discussions of problems, thinking out loud, posing questions with selective intervention and guidance of the facilitator.

Open ended and framework approaches: A facilitator may emphasize one or the other of two different approaches. The open ended approach interferes minimally, while the framework approach stipulates areas of inquiry. Both approaches work and have been used effectively in different situations.

Group dynamics: Depending on the degree maturity and self-reliance of the evaluation team, the group may want to know how well their management/evaluator group works. The facilitator could stimulate questions related to this aspect and guide the group in building the team.

9. Matching methods to problems and people

Choosing the methods is a process of matching methods with what participants do want to know and what participants can do and can learn.

Method	Indication	Contra indication
Surveys	Gives air of authority	Time consuming and skills required for preparation and analysis
Interviews key persons	Benefit from wisdom	Time consuming to transcribe and report
Case studies	Gathers complex data easily and dramatizes findings	Literacy required and time for preparation
Village mapping	Excellent for eliciting information	Information is not quantitative
Group meeting	Quick and most effective for evaluating organizational governance	May bring latent conflict in the group to the surface.

10. Putting knowledge to work

Creating a common body of knowledge: There is a qualitative difference between separate pieces of information some persons know, and a body of knowledge everyone knows. Creating a common body of knowledge is the key to converting information into a plan of action.

Disseminating information: Instead of graphs and concept diagrams, pictures and common symbols will do. The idea in compiling the information is to teach, not to impress others.

Converting ideas into action: In a single exercise, participants acquire knowledge and become the agents of change. This is the first step in the process of achieving sustainable development. Collecting information and spreading the word among the group members creates bonds of common knowledge, people learned something. This common knowledge gives people the power to act.

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