PARTICIPATORY METHODS TOOLKIT

A practitioner's manual

Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation

Colophon

Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation

I. DEFINITION

A Participatory Evaluation is an opportunity for the stakeholders of a project to stop and reflect on the past in order to make decisions about the future. Through the evaluation process participants share the control and responsibility for:

- deciding what is to be evaluated
- selecting the methods and data sources
- carrying out the evaluation and
- analysing information and presenting evaluation results.

PAME can (ideally) be conducted as part of a broader participatory process (see the section on best practices) or as a separate exercise.

II. WHEN TO USE

Participatory Evaluation may be conducted for the following reasons:

- Because it has been planned(!)
  Participatory Evaluation can be planned at various points throughout a project. These can be mid-way through a series of activities or after each activity, depending on when the community decides it needs to stop and examine past performance.
- Because a (potential) crisis is looming
  Participatory Evaluation can help to avoid a potential crisis by bringing people together to discuss and mediate a solution to important issues.
- Because a problem has become apparent
  Problems, such as a general lack of community interest in activities, may be apparent. Participatory Evaluation may provide more information that can help people determine why there is a problem and how to remedy it.
- To introduce and establish a participatory approach.
  A Participatory Evaluation may shed some understanding on why a project is not working very well. The results of a Participatory Evaluation may be the entry point for a more participatory approach to the project in general.

III. PROCEDURE[1]

A. Overview

The extensive planning phase of a participatory evaluation includes recruiting staff, who will conduct the following steps:
- review objectives and activities
- review reasons for evaluation
- develop evaluation questions
- decide who will do the evaluation
- identify direct and indirect indicators
- identify the information sources
- determine the skills and labour that are required to obtain information
- determine when information gathering and analysis can be done
- determine who will gather information.

The information is then gathered in a database, partially analysed and then presented to the appropriate public, who further analyse the information collectively. Finally, conclusions and action plans are developed from insights learned.

B. Realisation

1. PERSONNEL AND TASKS

The personnel required to conduct an evaluation varies widely, depending upon variables such as the scope of the project being evaluated, its geographical range and the number and type of methods used to collect and analyse data. However, the following requirements should be taken into consideration:

- A director will be needed to supervise the overall evaluation and ensure that the various parts come together to
- cohesive whole.
- Moderators will be needed to facilitate group data collection techniques.
- Researchers will be needed to conduct analyses and facilitate, perhaps with a moderator, group analyses.
- Administrative staff will be required to organise logistical matters, such as meeting locations, travel and accommodation, etc.

2. PLANNING THE EVALUATION

The time that is taken to carefully prepare and plan a Participatory Evaluation is time well spent. The preparatory process helps participants understand what they are evaluating, why and how they are going to do it.
The first meeting to prepare and plan the evaluation should be open to all interested groups, including beneficiaries, others in the community and sponsors. If a great number of people are interested in the evaluation, some of the responsibilities of the evaluation can be delegated to a small group, a community evaluation team. However, at the first mee-

[1] This section is largely an edited version of Case, D. (1990).

ting, the whole group must first discuss why they are doing an evaluation and what they wish to know in order to provide guidance to the community evaluation team.

(1) Review objectives and activities.

Discuss:

- What are the stakeholders' long-term and immediate objectives?
- What activities were chosen to meet these objectives?

Scenario-building can be a very useful tool to think about longer term goals in a holistic manner. For additional tools that are useful for identifying objectives refer to the list of analysis techniques provided in this publication.

(2) Review reasons for evaluation.

After objectives and activities are reviewed, discussion can focus on the questions:

- Why are we conducting an evaluation?
- What do we want to know?

(3) Develop evaluation questions.
In a brainstorming session participants should propose evaluation questions, which the facilitator writes (or draws) on large sheets of paper, a blackboard, etc. The group should discuss and agree on each question. If many questions are generated around each objective and activity, they can be ranked in order of importance.
If the project evaluation can be divided into two or more sub-sections, one can also divide the group into sub-groups that focus on one or more of these subsections.

(4) Decide who will do the evaluation.

In the plenary decide who will do the evaluation and who will want to know the results. It may be decided to include all the stakeholders (especially if it is small), only the beneficiaries or to delegate the responsibility for the evaluation to an evaluation team. The composition of the evaluation team should be decided by the larger group at this first meeting. If it is known that some minority groups will not be represented, the facilitator may encourage the participation of spokespersons from these groups on the evaluation team. The evaluation team may include beneficiaries, those who may be disadvantaged by an activity, community members and other affected groups.

The larger group also decides who needs the results of evaluation and when the results should be ready. This will depend on who needs the information to make decisions and when decisions are to be made.

(5) Identify direct and indirect indicators.

Taking the evaluation questions that were generated in the first meeting direct and indirect indicators are chosen for evaluation questions.

Direct Indicators

Direct indicators are pieces of information that expressly relate to what is being measured. For example, if information on election attendance is required, then the number of ballots cast is counted and perhaps set in proportion to the entire population.

Indirect Indicators

Indirect indicators are pieces of information chosen to serve as substitutes to answer questions that are difficult to measure.

For example, some people may argue that one's standard of living is not best indicated (only) by their income. Rather, locals might argue that there are more telling indirect indicators:

- Persons are poor if they have to hire themselves out as labour.
- Persons are rich if they can hire labour.

Thus, two indirect indicators could be the number of persons in the community who fall into each category.

In developing indicators some important questions to be answered are:

- What do we want to know?
- What are the pieces of information that could tell us this?
- What are the best pieces of information ('key indicators') that will tell us this most accurately?
- Is the information accessible?

Indicators should be chosen that are accurate and illuminating as to the nature of the problem or issues. In addition, it is important to verify that the necessary information can be gathered. Establishing good indicators will reduce the amount of information that needs to be collected.

(6) Identify the information sources.

For each evaluation question and indicator that is chosen, the evaluation team identifies what information sources are available, which sources to choose and how to obtain the information. Some 'raw' data (unanalysed information) may be available and require some effort to analyse. Other information may not be readily available and will have to be gathered.

If information is not readily available, it must be decided which information gathering tool will be used to obtain information. The choice of tools will depend on the kind of information needed. Remember that it is possible to use one tool to gather information for a number of indicators. If an information-gathering tool has been used before, it may be used again to update the information and show change. For additional tools that are useful for gathering information for Participatory Evaluations, refer to the list of analysis techniques provided in this publication.

(7) Determine the skills and labour that are required to obtain information.

The assistance of people with specific skills, such as interviewing, mathematics, art and/or drama, as well as a certain

amount of labour (time), will be required. The evaluation team must decide which skills and resources are available to them. They might ask the questions:

- What resources do we need?
- What resources do we have or can we develop?
- What additional resources do we need to get?

(8) Determine when information gathering and analysis can be done.

It is important to assure that information will be gathered and analysed within the time frame that is given to the evaluation team, so that the results can reach decision-makers on time. The timing of the evaluations must take into account factors such as seasonal constraints (planting and harvesting times), religious holidays, field staff availability and community labour demands.

Make a schedule: For each tool that is used the evaluation team decides approximately how long each task will take and when it will be done.

(9) Determine who will gather information.

When the specific dates, the required time and skills are known, the tasks can be delegated to individuals or small working groups.

3. DATA COLLECTION

(1) Collect the information.

Each of the delegated individuals should gather the information for which they are responsible. All of the data should be collected centrally.

(2) Form database.

The information collected should be put into a manageable format to facilitate the analysis process.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

When all the tasks have been completed, it will be necessary to analyse and synthesise information for presentation. Some of the information may already be analysed and will simply have to be put in its place in the presentation. The evaluation team can decide what will be the best way to present results, given the audience for whom the results are intended, the resources and time available.

Analysis is examining information (sorting it out, adding it up, comparing it) in order to understand the 'parts' in relationship to the 'whole'. Some of the analysis may have already been done, or partially done, depending on which information gathering tools have been used.

Some steps in information analysis for evaluations are provided below.

(1) Review the questions.

The questions generated before the information was gathered should be reviewed. Why was this particular information necessary? What questions was it to answer? What kinds of decisions are to be made based on this information?

It is common for people to work very hard planning for the information they need and then, once the information is collected, to not look back and renew their understanding of the central issues and key questions.

Important results that were not anticipated should not be ignored. Sometimes putting information together will raise important, unforeseen and relevant questions. These can be noted for future reference and pointed out in the presentation of results.

(2) Organise the information.

Gather together all relevant information that has been collected. If necessary, sort information into parts that belong together. The way in which the information is organised and categorised will vary according to the thinking processes of different people. Some information may have already been analysed while other will require further analysis.

(3) Decide how to analyse information.

Analysis of parts may be simply adding up numbers and averaging them or comparing information to examine the relationship of one thing to another or two things together. In the process of analysis, one can also:

- take note of similarities
- make contrasts by setting two things in opposition in order to show the differences
- relate pieces of information to establish relationships between them.

(4) Analyse quantitative information.

Quantitative (numbers) information can be computed by hand or with the use of adding machines.

Refer to the list of analysis techniques, provided in this publication, for tools that can be used to facilitate participatory analysis.

(5) Analyse qualitative information.

Analysis of qualitative (descriptive) information is a creative and critical process. The way the information has been gathered will probably determine how it can best be analysed. For example, if drawings of a community have been done

at the beginning, middle and end of the project, these can be analysed by presenting a series of drawings to a number of individuals and asking them to:

- validate the drawings (are they truly representative, and if not, why not)
- rate the difference (very good, good, not very good, etc).

Refer to the list of analysis techniques, provided in this publication, for tools that can be used to facilitate participatory analysis.

(6) Integrate the information.

The team that has been assigned to gather and analyse information can put the analysed parts together in a way that tells the complete story. Partial analysis can be presented to the larger community group for completion.

5. PRESENTATION & ACTION PLAN

(1) Presentation of initial results.

Once the information has been collected and (partially) analysed, hold another meeting with the larger group to present the initial results. It can be very effective to present the information in partially analysed form.

The benefits of partial analysis are:

- The larger group has an opportunity to contribute to further analysis.
- The results are validated by more people and will be more reliable.
- More people can understand the process of analysis.

If the information is presented in partially analysed form, the group will need to do further analysis to answer their initial questions.

Regardless of the form in which the information is presented, the group will have to discuss the implications of the results for their initial questions.

- Have new questions arisen that require additional collection of information?
- What conclusions can be drawn?
- How can we learn from the results?
- What are the different options available to address the emerging issues?

Encourage thorough discussion of these questions, allowing people to express their perspectives regarding how the information should be interpreted.

The emphasis of the conclusions should not be upon success or failure but upon learning. Insights gained from the evaluation process might also inspire the group to reconsider their initial objectives. This is part of the iterative learning process that is comprised by participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

> **TIP:** Discourage the group from focusing on blaming or accusations for any poor results. Instead orient the discussion around the future, exploring new and better paths toward the desired future.

If additional information is required to answer pressing new questions, then devise a plan to gather the needed data, following the steps above.

(2) Develop a future action plan.

Finally, the group should discuss and decide upon a plan of action, based on the results.

- Based on what has been learned, what steps are to be taken now?
- Who will do what?
- Within what time period?

> **TIP:** In developing a plan of action and in reconsidering the initial goals prospective methods, such as scenario workshops, can be very useful.

(3) Write up a final report.

The final report should include the questions, participants, method, analysis procedures, conclusions and a summary of the new plan of action. For tips on writing an evaluation report, particularly from a local perspective, refer to the 'Presentation of Results' section in Case, D. (1990):
http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5307e/x5307e00.htm#Contents

IV. RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS (TIME, BUDGET)

The resources required for a participatory evaluation will vary widely, depending in part upon:
- the complexity of the issues being evaluated
- the methods used for data collection
- the availability and cost of persons skilled to collect and analyse the data (personnel costs)
- the geographic scope of the issue being evaluated (travel and accommodation costs)
- whether or not the evaluation is built into a general participatory project (saves time and avoids duplication of many costs).

V. ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

It is strongly advisable to make participatory evaluations one aspect of a broader participatory approach to project development. This will enhance stakeholder ownership from the beginning of the project and will also be more cost effective.

Ideally, the evaluation process should be iterative and seen as part of a larger planning/development or decision-making process. When evaluations can be planned regularly throughout a long-term project, they are more likely to be seen as aimed toward learning and improvement than as a one-off judgement. In addition, progress can be improved in the long run when lessons are learned from evaluations early in the project. The process of developing indicators helps people to define their goals more precisely and thus to generate more concrete action plans.

Take extra care to ensure that the data collected answer the real questions being asked. Avoid the pitfall of choosing a particular method of data collection because it is easy, but may not really attain information that is useful to learning how a project can be improved.

In conducting evaluations be careful to consider the long-term perspective. It is sometimes natural in development processes for things to get, or superficially appear to get, worse before they get better.

References and Resources

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