
CHAPTER 9

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

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In this chapter, we discuss the process of participatory evaluation in detail. This discussion will include: a detailed description of participatory evaluation; timing; process and tips on implementation.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Once a project, or a project activity, is completed, an evaluation determines whether and to what extent the project or activity was able to achieve its objectives. By carrying out an evaluation, we can ascertain:

- Whether the project was implemented according to plan;
- Whether the project achieved the desired results;
- Whether the project achieved more than was planned;
- What worked well, and what did not work well;
- What could have been done differently.

This analysis further helps in determining:

- Whether such projects or activities should be extended for more time in the same geographic area;
- Whether the same or similar types of activities should be replicated elsewhere;
- Whether the project requires major modifications in strategy and approach in order to be effective ;

- What needs to be different in terms of strategy and approach when replicating the project elsewhere.

While regular monitoring keeps track of progress and provides information on the above-mentioned issues, evaluation goes beyond routine monitoring data. For example, some evaluations include special surveys or data collection processes so that additional data and insight are available. Another difference between monitoring and evaluation is that, while monitoring is carried out by community participants and project staff, evaluation usually involves outsiders.

Note that an evaluation can provide valuable information for planning new activities within the same project, or in designing new projects.

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Participatory evaluation refers to the process of evaluation where all project partners – community participants and project staff — are involved. Instead of having a team of outsiders visit the project to carry out the evaluation, the project partners themselves conduct the evaluation. If an outsider is involved, her or his role should be to facilitate the process and serve as a technical resource.

In participatory evaluation, all key decisions regarding the evaluation are made by the project partners. These include:

- Timing, when to carry out the evaluation;
- Process, indicators and analysis;
- Sharing and reporting and using the findings.

Participatory evaluation is most effective when the project design and implementation have also been carried out in a participatory manner.

Participatory design of the project implies that all the partners jointly decided the project scope and activities, and share the same vision regarding the project objectives and expected results. This ensures that from the very beginning all project partners have been involved in deciding the indicators on which the project will be monitored and evaluated. Likewise, when it is time for the evaluation, all partners should be clear about why and how the evaluation will be carried out.

Very few projects, however, follow a complete participatory process. While it is possible to carry out a participatory evaluation even when project design and implementation have not followed a participatory process, this requires more time, and has to be planned differently. The process should start with a discussion among participating community and project staff about designing such an evaluation process. Sometimes we hear examples of 'participatory evaluation' where community members are involved in answering questions framed by outside evaluators, or where community members are asked to analyze issues determined by outside evaluators. Please note that this is NOT the definition of participatory evaluation used in this manual.

WHY DO WE NEED PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Participatory evaluation is the logical culmination of a participatory process. Starting with participatory design, and continuing with participatory project implementation and monitoring, leads to the stage of participatory evaluation at the end of the project. Just as involving communities was critical in designing an appropriate project, their involvement is critical in understanding the effectiveness of the project once it is over. This means not just involvement in terms of answering questions posed by outside evaluators, but involvement in designing the evaluation – what questions to ask, who to ask, etc.

A good, and useful, evaluation should include the perspectives of all concerned – community participants, project staff, donors, and outside ‘experts.’ These perspectives on the same project may be very different, and the complete picture emerges only when we are able to bring together all of these perspectives. For example, a donor may feel that a project has been very successful because it has carried out all of its planned training programs, and provides evidence of positive change in people’s attitudes towards people living with HIV and AIDS. Community participants may feel that the training led to a series of community actions that strengthened their community’s collective response to HIV/AIDS, and that that was the most important achievement of the project. While both may be looking at very similar issues, their process of analysis is very different.

If we depend on an evaluation designed and carried out by outsiders, the process will have limited value for the people for whom the project was intended. Participatory evaluation ensures that communities are involved in not only the design and analysis of the information, but in controlling the process of evaluating activities that they designed and took part in.

Participatory evaluations are also by nature more flexible than conventional evaluations. Conventional evaluations are externally determined and are usually designed on the basis of information available in project documents. During a participatory evaluation, we have an opportunity to go beyond the stated objectives in the project document, and to include issues and indicators from people’s experience with the project. Sometimes there are issues that were not foreseen before project implementation began. These can be determined during a participatory evaluation.

When is the best time to carry out participatory evaluation?

Evaluation is integral in every stage of project development. Larger projects may include several clusters of project activities that are implemented over different lengths of time. For example, a project could implement an awareness-raising activity for one year, and provide support to AIDS-affected households for three years. Such a project may decide to evaluate each activity cluster when it comes to an end; in terms of the example, a final evaluation of awareness-raising would be scheduled at the end of year one and final evaluation of support to AIDS-affected households at the end of year three.

Some projects with large budgets, and implemented over a long period of time (for example, 4-5 years) could plan a mid-term review. Such a mid-term review can also be designed as an evaluation – with a key objective of determining whether the project is on course and/or whether it requires changes in strategy.

HOW DO WE CARRY OUT A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Participatory evaluation is carried out in stages as described below.

Planning a Participatory Evaluation

Good planning is central to the success of a participatory evaluation. The planning process begins with discussions among the project partners on the following:

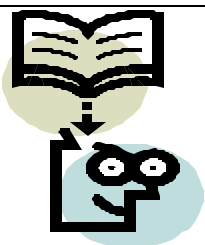
- When to carry out the participatory evaluation?
- How to carry it out?
- Who will participate in the process, and how?
- How will the information be analyzed?
- How will this analysis be shared and used by the project partners?

Once everyone has agreed to a time frame for the evaluation, it will be important to decide precisely what to evaluate. This will help guide data collection and will inform selections of data collection methods. If possible, all project partners should come together to discuss and decide upon the scope of the evaluation.

Since an evaluation is carried out to determine the project's level of achievement, a good starting point is with project objectives. Each objective also has a list of expected indicators. This list forms the basis of the evaluation process. This is the project partners' first opportunity to add new items which had not been foreseen beforehand.

At this stage, it is time to have a look at the results from the baseline conducted at the beginning of the project. You need to decide whether the indicators selected for the baseline will suffice to carry out the evaluation, or whether additional indicators are necessary to capture the complete picture.

It should be clear from the very beginning how results from your evaluation will be used. Often, evaluations are seen as a donor requirement, and the evaluation ends with sending a report to the donor. However, participatory evaluation should be of equal value to all project partners – participating communities, project staff, and donors. Results should be shared with other development agencies in the region so that they can learn from the project's experience as well.



Remember!

When planning an evaluation, keep these two points in mind:

- ✓ It is important that resources be kept aside for the participatory evaluation. A budget can be prepared beforehand for this purpose.
- ✓ It also helps to have clear planning on the logistics required for the evaluation – dates for visits/meetings/discussions, venue, travel, stationery and material, etc.

COLLECTING INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Implementing a Participatory Evaluation

Once we know what we are evaluating, we need to decide how to collect information for the evaluation. We basically have four ways to carry out an evaluation:

- ✓ **Use monitoring data** from the project to analyze the project implementation process – whether all the activities that were planned were actually carried out; whether the funds were spent as planned; whether all linkages that were to be established have been established; etc. All this information can be obtained from the project monitoring system – records, routine monitoring reports (monthly reports, annual report, etc), special reports like minutes of meetings, workshop reports, training reports, special studies that the project may have carried out, and so on.
- ✓ **Repeat the baseline survey** in order to determine change in indicators. By repeating this survey, you will clearly see the impact experienced by the

project participants. This repeat survey will take considerable time and resources, and so requires good planning and budgeting.

- ✓ **Conduct focus group discussions with project participants and project staff** to gauge different perspectives on their experience with the project. Such discussions go beyond the baseline survey mentioned above, and provide in-depth analysis on project results and lessons learned.
- ✓ Sometimes it is useful to have **focus group discussions with non-participants** of the project as well. This provides perspectives from those who were not involved in the project activities, but may have been positively or negatively affected by the project.

ANALYZING INFORMATION

Data analysis can be carried out in three stages:

Stage 1

Collect all data from different sources (monitoring reports, baseline, repeat survey, workshops, etc.), and arrange it in a comparable format. This means putting together data on the same indicator for before and after the project. To ensure that the comparison is accurate, the same indicator and the same units of measurement must be used.

Stage 2

The second step is to compare all data available. One obvious axis of comparison is over time (for example, behavior patterns before and after the project). There can be other types of comparison:

- **Gender:** are results different for women as compared to men?

- **Age groups:** are results different for youth as compared to older people?
- **Location:** are results different across different villages or neighborhoods? Rural versus urban sites?
- **Project activities:** were some activities more effective than others?

You can determine the type of comparison needed based on the dimensions of the project. Your analysis will determine the effectiveness of the project, and the type and extent of impact the different activities have had.

Stage 3:

The final step is to document your analysis. A report is usually prepared at the end of an evaluation. Unless the data and its analysis are properly documented, it will be difficult to put together such a report.

SHARING INFORMATION AND KEY FINDINGS

Sharing of information is key to the participatory evaluation process. Sharing is carried out with partners, and with others not directly involved with the project. Such a sharing process helps in several ways:

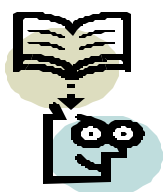
- Communicating the different perspectives among the partners;
- Developing an output that is acceptable to all;
- Enabling joint decisions on future action;
- Sharing experiences with others who may be implementing similar projects.

Hence, there is 'sharing' both during and after the evaluation process. Sharing and communicating during the evaluation process enables understanding issues from different perspectives. Sharing and discussing results from the repeat baseline survey will allow project partners to discuss findings that were not adequately explained in the survey report.

Any discussion of evaluation results should focus on gathering suggestions for future projects, or on the future of the project, if the donor is willing to consider funding a new phase. This includes discussing why some activities worked better than the others, why some activities failed, which activities need further testing, whether some of the activities could have been done differently, and so on.

Such sharing and discussion create an output that is owned by all partners. It is important to remember that evaluation is not simply to determine success or failure, but to determine ways to do the same things better, and to learn from the process.

It is useful to share these results more widely – with local and national policy makers, for example – so that experiences generated at the community level can be considered while making policy decisions.



Remember!

- ✓ Participatory evaluation is usually carried out at the end of the project.
- ✓ Participatory evaluation is jointly carried out by all project partners.
- ✓ Key decisions regarding the evaluation are made jointly by all project partners.
- ✓ Plan well in advance, ensure that resources are available.
- ✓ Be clear, and get agreement among all partners, on what is being evaluated.
- ✓ Use the baseline survey to develop a repeat survey that will reveal changes experienced over the life of the project in relation to selected indicators.
- ✓ Comparisons can be made over time, gender, age, location, different project activities, etc.
- ✓ It is important to document the results and share them widely.
- ✓ And finally, it is important to keep reminding ourselves that an evaluation is not simply to determine success or failure, but an effort to find ways of doing things better, and to learn from the process.

Social Mapping as an Evaluation tool

Social maps can be used in a variety of ways. They are useful for conducting participatory appraisals and baselines and can also be a great tool in participatory evaluation. The social maps below were developed during a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation workshop held in Kampala, Uganda. Participants were interested in tracing the number of pastoral voluntary and counseling centers (PVCT) in an imaginary settlement. First, a map was constructed of what the settlement looked like before the intervention depicting the main roads, water sources, households, trading centers, feeder roads, churches, mosques, schools, clinics, bridges and swamps. The black circles symbolize existing voluntary pastoral counseling centers. As the project advances, new PVCT centers are plotted onto the map.

Before Intervention



After Intervention



Three years later, by looking at the map above, one can see that there are more PVCT centers, and that there is an increase in the number of centers located in remote areas, contributing to greater access of services by the community.