

# PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION



A participatory evaluation actively involves key stakeholders, especially the intended beneficiaries of a project or programme, in the design and implementation of the evaluation. Participatory evaluations can be carried out for many reasons. The two most common are to empower beneficiaries to better analyse and improve their own situations, and to produce better and more reliable findings and recommendations.

A participatory evaluation actively involves key stakeholders, especially the intended beneficiaries of a project or programme, in the design and implementation of the evaluation. Participatory evaluations are carried out for many different reasons (see Bakewell et. al. 2003, Guijt 2014, ActionAid 2016).

- A participatory evaluation may be carried out to enable beneficiaries to better analyse their own situation, and take steps to improve it. When carried out for this purpose a participatory evaluation is designed to empower beneficiaries.
- Some organisations, particularly those operating from a rights-based perspective, believe that beneficiaries have the right to be fully involved in all aspects of a project or programme, including evaluation. This is because they believe people have a right to influence decisions that may affect them, whether directly or indirectly.
- In some cases a participatory evaluation can be designed to improve relationships between those running a project or programme and beneficiaries, or between beneficiaries and other stakeholders. In these cases a participatory evaluation may be designed to directly contribute towards the project or programme goals and objectives.
- A participatory evaluation may also be carried out to improve the quality of information collected and analysed through the evaluation, and to maximise the potential for findings to be used. Participatory evaluations often result in better information because beneficiaries understand their own situations better than external stakeholders, and are often better able to explain what has changed for them and why.
- Participatory evaluations are frequently used when it is considered important to access a wide range of perspectives. In other words, when the need is to understand change from many different viewpoints, rather than attempting to acquire a single viewpoint from an outside evaluator or team of evaluators.

Participatory evaluations may be carried out for just one of the reasons described above, or for more than one reason. Understanding the purpose of a participatory evaluation is important as it helps guide decisions on who should participate, when and how.

## *When to use participatory evaluation*

A participatory evaluation can be applied as a specific form of evaluation on its own. Or it can be applied in combination with other forms of evaluation such as impact evaluation, gender-responsive evaluation or theory-based evaluation. Participatory evaluation methods may also be applied as a distinct part of another evaluation. For example, an evaluation might involve a rigorous randomised-control trial, based on expert statistical analysis, to establish what has changed due to a development intervention. At the same time, beneficiaries could be encouraged to participate in data collection and analysis processes that help explain how and why those changes happened.

A participatory evaluation can be carried out in almost any circumstance. However, it is most likely to be applied where:

- a project or programme is designed to affect the lives of many different beneficiaries;
- the impact of a project or programme may be realised in many ways;
- a project or programme is designed to address issues around social inclusion, such as gender or disability;
- a project or programme is concerned with mobilisation, empowerment, or other forms of social development; and/or
- the organisation carrying out the evaluation is committed to a rights-based approach.

## *How it works*

Participatory evaluations can be carried out in many ways, according to the needs of the evaluation and the type of project or programme being evaluated. However, whilst there are no fixed steps, almost all participatory evaluations conform to a few common processes.

The first step in a participatory evaluation is always to agree which stakeholders should be involved and why. This means being clear about what purpose stakeholder participation will serve in the evaluation, which stakeholders (or groups of stakeholders) should be

involved, and what kind of participation is feasible in the circumstances (Guijt 2014).

After that, a participatory evaluation often involves many of the same steps as any other kind of evaluation. These include developing a Terms of Reference (ToR); appointing an evaluation team; designing and conducting the evaluation; and reporting, disseminating and using findings. In some areas, however, there may be differences in the way a participatory evaluation is conducted. These include the following.

- A traditional evaluation often seeks to assess a project or programme against a set of pre-defined objectives and/or indicators, usually contained within a logical framework or similar planning tool. A participatory evaluation is more likely to allow beneficiaries to identify their own objectives and/or indicators of change.
- In a participatory evaluation, the role of the evaluator is to facilitate discussions rather than to achieve an external 'objective' assessment. It is more likely that several different viewpoints will be included in any findings as opposed to an overall consensus. These different viewpoints often reflect the views of different groups, such as women, men and youth.
- The methods used to collect and analyse data in a participatory evaluation should allow for the maximum involvement of different potential beneficiaries. There is a large range of tools and methodologies which have been specifically designed to enable stakeholder participation within evaluations. Some of these have been specially designed for specific groups such as children, people with disabilities, illiterate or semi-literate people, etc.
- In a participatory evaluation a report may be developed in collaboration between the evaluators and beneficiaries, or other stakeholders. Reports may also be produced and/or disseminated in different ways to maximise the potential benefits to the beneficiaries.
- In traditional evaluations, results are shared after an evaluation has been written up and agreed between the evaluators and the organisation commissioning the evaluation. In a participatory evaluation, results and recommendations may be shared with beneficiaries

immediately, and recommendations agreed before being submitted in a report.

## Challenges

There are many potential advantages of commissioning and running a participatory evaluation (see IFRC 2008). These include helping to build local ownership within projects and programmes, building consensus between different groups of stakeholders, enhancing local learning and management capacity, providing immediate information for decision-making and empowering beneficiaries to make their own decisions.

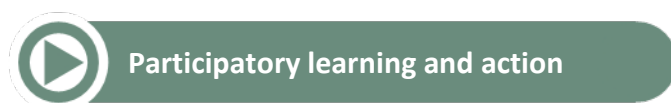
However, Guijt (2014, p18) argues that *"the benefits of participation ... are neither automatic nor guaranteed"*. Participatory evaluations can be difficult to facilitate and may involve additional time, energy and resources. Some of the more challenging aspects are as follows.

- It is easier to manage an evaluation if the evaluator is in control of data collection, analysis and reporting. It is much harder if the evaluator needs to ensure that different stakeholders are involved throughout the process. In these cases considerable facilitation skills may be required.
- There is always a risk that the more powerful voices in a community may come to dominate. For example, men may dominate women in discussions, or older women may dominate younger women.
- Participatory evaluations may be very time consuming for the intended beneficiaries of a project or programme. Beneficiaries may not want to participate in evaluations, or may have other demands on their time that they consider more important, or more urgent.
- Participation is always more effective when planned from the start of a project or programme. It is more difficult to carry out a participatory evaluation if participation has not been considered right from the start. For example, if a community was not involved in defining objectives and/or indicators at the start of a project or programme then it may be more difficult for them to contribute at the evaluation stage.

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## Further reading and resources

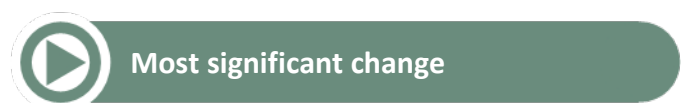
Different methodologies for collecting and analysing information in a participatory way can be found in the M&E Universe papers on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and Most Significant Change (MSC). Other relevant papers deal with beneficiary participation in M&E and different types of evaluation.



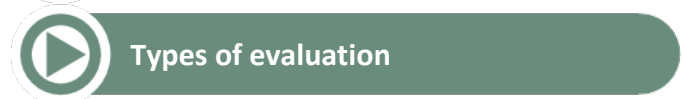
Participatory learning and action



Participatory M&E



Most significant change



Types of evaluation

The Better Evaluation website ([www.betterevaluation.org](http://www.betterevaluation.org)) contains the largest set of resources in the world covering evaluation in the social development sector. The site offers step-by-step guidance for those managing or implementing evaluations. Experienced evaluators, or those with an interest in evaluation, are recommended to go to that site and search through the different materials.

## References

- ActionAid (2016). *How to... Select a Methodological Approach for the Evaluation*. Evaluation Technical Briefing Note, #7. ActionAid, UK.
- Bakewell, O; Adams, J and Pratt, B (2003), *Sharpening the Development Process; A practical guide to monitoring and evaluation*. INTRAC, UK.
- Guijt, I (2014). *Participatory Approaches, Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.
- IFRC (2008). *Monitoring and Evaluation in a Nutshell*. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Department.

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