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Joanne Harnmeijer is a Zimbabwe-based consultant working for ETC, Consultants for Development, Leusden, The Netherlands. Originally a medical doctor, she has worked in many different areas of rural development and in her assignments tries to incorporate participatory approaches, as and where appropriate. Her main areas of interest are monitoring and evaluation. Her address is ETC in Zimbabwe, 31 Hazel Rd, Mandara, Harare, Zimbabwe. Fax: +263-4-486954; E-mail: hmeijer@zol.co.zw

Ann Waters-Bayer is an agricultural sociologist with the consultancy and study group ETC Ecoculture. She has been involved in participatory planning, implementation and evaluation of research and development activities in natural resource management, particularly with pastoralists in Africa, for the past 20 years. She can be contacted at ETC, PO Box 64, NL-3830 AB Leusden, Netherlands (Fax: +31-33-4940791) or at her home office in Rohnsweg 56, D-37085 Goettingen, Germany (Tel: +49-551-485751, Fax: 47948, E-mail: wb.waters@link-goe.de

Wolfgang Bayer is an agricultural biologist specialising in tropical pasture management and forage husbandry. He has over 20 years' experience in Livestock Systems Research and in backstopping and evaluating pastoral research and development projects in Africa and Asia. He lectures at the University of Goettingen, works as a freelance consultant and can be contacted at the same address in Goettingen as Ann Waters-Bayer.

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# Executive Summary

Participatory evaluation (PE) of development co-operation has become increasingly popular in recent years. It can have a number of advantages over conventional evaluations, whose outcomes often depend on the evaluators' ability to see through the 'screens' thrown up by those being evaluated, and on the individuals selected for the task, and can engender little sense of ownership of findings amongst project staff.

However, the literature on participatory evaluation tends solely to emphasise participation by beneficiary communities in the evaluation process. In this paper, the authors draw on two participatory evaluations conducted in Zimbabwe and the Sudan. They argue that the view that beneficiaries must be the sole focus to make an evaluation 'participatory' is untenable. Indeed, an exclusive focus on participation of the beneficiaries limits the extent to which legitimate questions of other stakeholders, such as implementing agencies and donors, can be answered. Furthermore, findings of participatory evaluations which involve other stakeholders, particularly project staff, are more likely to be acted upon. Similarly, they describe how a false dichotomy exists between conventional and participatory methods. Each has its particular merits and purposes, and they can be used in combination or in sequence.

They conclude with the following observations:

- The term 'participatory evaluation' may be broadened to include participation not only of communities, but also of an appropriate range of other stakeholders such as project staff, local authorities and funding agencies.

- The optimal mix of participation of communities, other stakeholders and external experts in evaluation must be considered for each specific case, and will depend on the review's purpose and the project's history, complexity and institutional setting.

- Likewise, the optimal mix of participatory and conventional methods should be decided by the questions the review is addressing.

- PEs are more challenging and time-consuming than conventional evaluations; the higher costs should be justified by the comparative advantages they offer.

- There should be clarity and consensus on the implications of a PE for coverage of conventional evaluation topics; evaluators must consider and negotiate terms of reference with care and avoid the impression that they can do an in-depth participatory study as well as deliver a conventional wide ranging review report.

- Preconditions for successful PEs include availability of competent and motivated field staff with an eye for detail; focus on a limited number of issues of common interest to stakeholders concerned (e.g. communities, funders, implementing agency); and sufficient funding to enable careful preparation of field sessions.

# DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION: EXPERIENCES FROM ZIMBABWE AND THE SUDAN

Joanne Harnmeijer, Ann Waters-Bayer and Wolfgang Bayer

## Evaluations: Disease or Cure?

Conventional evaluations of development co-operation assess achievements and failures in order to advise donors and implementing agencies whether to continue, change or close down a programme or project. Such evaluations are generally carried out by external experts, who largely depend on documented information, interviews and short field visits.

The outcomes of such evaluations depend on the evaluators' ability to see through the 'screens' thrown up by those being evaluated. They also depend strongly on the individuals selected for the task, who may be quite familiar with the requirements and procedures within the funding organisation but less familiar with the institutional setting of the project. Some experts cultivate the illusion that an evaluation can be objective but, in reality it is always influenced by the personal judgement of the evaluators. It is therefore hardly surprising that different evaluators will draw '*very different conclusions ... from similar source documents*' (Riddell, 1987).

Those at the receiving end - project staff - feel that they have little grip on how their data and opinions are interpreted. They may then claim that evaluators base their judgements on shallow or faulty evidence because of lack of time, insufficient knowledge or prejudice. Or they may revel in the positive findings and ignore the criticisms - an easy thing to do as evaluators, aware of their limitations or apprehensive about their position, often shroud their findings in overly careful language. The net result is that evaluations can have little impact on project implementers.

For these reasons, participatory evaluations (PEs) have become increasingly popular. These can involve both project staff and beneficiary communities as evaluation partners and suppliers of information. External consultants involved in such PEs are expected to give an impartial view of project progress and also to contribute to the process of learning and improving the methods and activities of the project. In this paper we examine two project evaluations, in Zimbabwe and the Sudan, which were carried out in a participatory mode. We discuss the benefits of such evaluations, and their shortcomings, and provide pointers as to when they should be used.

## Degrees of Participation: An artificial framework?

The literature on participatory evaluation places most emphasis on the degree of participation by beneficiary communities or 'end-users' in the evaluation process. Debates rage over the merits of 'true participation' versus the immorality of 'extracting data using participatory methods'. Likewise, there are some set ideas on preconditions for 'true' participation. Table 1 is an example of an attempt to define the 'ideal' in terms of end-user participation in evaluations.

**Table 1. Levels of end-user participation in evaluation**

| Dimensions | Low | Medium | High |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Initiator** | Commissioned or obligatory evaluation typically part of program development. Meets institutional needs. Evaluation done to, or about people. | External evaluator invites end-users to assist in one or more evaluation tasks. | Evaluation in which end-users collaborate with external facilitator or among themselves to assess, review and critically reflect on strategies formulated for them. |
| **Purpose** | Justify or continue funding. Ensure accountability. | Gain insights into development activity from end-user perspective. Shift focus from institutional concerns to end-user needs and interests. | Develop relevant, effective programme decision-making based on end-user views, opinions and recommendations. |
| **Questionmakers** | Agency heads, administrators, outside clientele, persons distant from evaluation side. | End-users with external evaluator, as determined by the evaluator. | End-users, external facilitator, persons most affected by development intervention. |
| **Methods** | Established research designs, statistical analyses. | Qualitative methods favoured but also includes quantitative methods. Values a process of open-ended enquiries. | Highly interactive qualitative methods but does not disregard quantitative tools. Inventiveness and creativity to adapt the methods to the context. |
| **Evaluator's role** | Takes lead in design. Formulates questions without input from those evaluated. | Evaluator works collaboratively with end-users. Evaluator is partner in evaluation and imparts evaluation skills. | Evaluator becomes a facilitator. Acts as catalyst and collaborator. Takes lead from end-users. Has few if any pre-determined questions. |
| **Impact/Outcome** | Reports, publications. Findings rarely circulated among end-users. Findings loop into planning stage with little input from end-users. | Shared data gathering but limited participation in data analysis. End-user views loop into planning stage. Increased understanding of end-user experiences. | End-users take part in analysis. End-user more capable of meaningful decision-making based on effective involvement in evaluation. Findings become property of end-users. |

Source: UNDP (1997)

From our experiences of external participatory evaluation in Zimbabwe and the Sudan, we argue that the end-users are not the only important group in an evaluation. The inclusion of several other groups is likely to benefit the project, ultimately having more spin-offs for communities, than community participation alone. These may include the project team, the counterpart organisation(s), local government agencies, the external implementing agency or the funders. Stakeholders' participation should thus not be rated in terms of whose participation qualifies as participation proper. We also argue that the divisions in this table between low, medium and high participation are not so clear-cut in reality.

We show that it is possible to design PEs, no matter whether they are externally or internally initiated, in such a way that the dimensions listed in Table 1 serve the needs of several stakeholders, at least partially.

# Dimensions of Participation in Zimbabwe

The Small Dam Rehabilitation Project (SDRP) implemented by CARE International aims to improve food security of drought-prone communities in Masvingo and Midland Provinces. It assists communities in protecting small reservoirs and catchment areas and in optimising their use. Part of the project (12 small dams) is Dutch-funded. In 1998 CARE (the implementing agency) and the Dutch Embassy (the funding agency) requested a focused in-depth review rather than a conventional broad-sweep evaluation. CARE encouraged the use of participatory methods during the external evaluation, but the terms of reference (ToRs) were fairly conventional. This meant that the evaluation team had to work hard to make the evaluation participatory for eliciting the opinions and perspectives of the project beneficiaries. The evaluation team consisted of two Zimbabwean consultants and a Dutch consultant based in Zimbabwe.

## From ToRs to Hypotheses

The review team wanted to design a study that would:

- be enjoyable and informative for all participants, including the illiterate and semi-literate, and so chose to use only visual methods at community level
- generate reliable data of high relevance and interest for all concerned
- accommodate new insights gained during the course of the study
- bank on the memory of the communities concerned as a form of baseline
- quantify qualitative issues (perceptions and opinions), where appropriate, separately for men and women

- build on community views to evaluate the role and performance of higher authorities, and use the visual outcome of community views for meetings at these other levels

- enable the staff of the implementing agency and local authorities to upgrade their participatory skills, and stimulate their interest in the outcome of the review

- respond to existing terms and demands of the review.

First, the team had extensive discussions with senior CARE staff and studied all information such as progress reports and technical assessments. They then 'translated' the ToRs into 10 hypothetical statements (Box 1) and checked with CARE that these reflected the major issues of concern. The team's methodology would have to provide ammunition to support, refine or reject the hypotheses.

**Box 1. Some examples of hypotheses for the SDRP evaluation**

On the numbers and types of people benefiting:
- Those benefiting from each small dam in the project area fall into two categories (1) direct beneficiaries numbering some 1,000 people per dam and, (2) indirect beneficiaries of about 1,500 people per dam.

On the perceived equality of benefits (gender and poverty orientation):
- Women, and notably poor women, are the main beneficiaries of the project's efforts.

On sustaining common property management - physical aspects:
- Common property natural resource management hinges on communities' appreciation of the interdependence between three components - community management, environmental rehabilitation and income. The incentive of improved income will sustain efforts on the other two components. (This is actually an assumption.)

On the project model:
- The project provides an appropriate and cost-effective model for achieving community-based common-property resource management which merits replication.

## From Hypotheses to Participatory Methods

For seven of the 10 hypothetical statements, the team chose a sequence of participatory methods for exploring the issues (Harnmeijer, 1998). The team also visited all 12 Dutch-funded dams to review overall project progress, a requirement added to the evaluators' ToRs by the funding agency. The two-day tour, guided by senior CARE staff, helped the evaluators to gain an overview of the entire project and to identify the sites suitable for inclusion in the PE.

CARE fieldstaff were keen to be involved in the evaluation. They commented on the proposed methodology and helped at all five community-level workshops in which an average of 50 people took part. The outputs of these community-level workshops included drawings, maps, Venn diagrams, and photographs of the process. The workshops also generated data in conventional tables with pre-designed formats. These were taken to district-level workshops, where district staff interpreted the tabulated data. This helped the evaluators explore the hypothetical statements that could only be partially addressed at community level, such as the project's efforts to make local authorities accountable towards communities.

The main factors that allowed a participatory approach to be taken in this evaluation were:

- a focus on a limited number of issues likely to be of common interest to the funders, the implementing agency and the communities

- sufficient funding to permit careful preparation (the approach was quite demanding in terms of preparation time and thus, consultants' fees)

- availability of field staff skilled in facilitation, with an analytical mind and an eye for detail

Referring back to Table 1, the various dimensions of the Zimbabwe evaluation do not fit neatly into one of the degrees of participation: low, medium or high. Although the review was commissioned as an 'obligatory evaluation' (top row of table), it was not top-down in its implementation. The insights gained on end-users' needs and interests did feed into programme decision-making and also helped to justify funding of these interests (second row). Most, but not all, issues defined by outside question-makers (third row) were also highly relevant for project staff and end-users; only issues thought to be of common interest were explored at community level. Admittedly, the evaluators had done the design beforehand, at their desks, but they had done this in great detail with a view to be ready for the role of facilitator, catalyst and collaborator in the field (fifth row). And communities who saw the outcome of their deliberations visualised on the spot in the form of votes, maps and drawings, did not seem to need further analysis or written reports (last row).

In choice of methods (fourth row) the evaluators did fulfil the table's high participation dimension for the seven hypotheses explored at community level. Here, participatory methods were chosen not only for the sake of participation, but also because they were, for the issues at hand, superior to conventional methods. However, on overall project issues, the evaluators used conventional methods such as one-to-one interviews and desk study, as these gave sufficient information and optimal use of (senior) project staff's time.

## Contributing to Change

A major advantage of building on community perceptions is credibility at higher levels of the administration. Instead of being seen to be trying to unsettle officials with penetrating questions, evaluators took on the role of messengers bringing community concerns to the fore. Moreover, as concerns were presented in the colourful way in which communities had depicted them, the atmosphere during these official meetings at the level of government offices and donor agency was relaxed and appreciative. The response of the officials was in itself revealing about their affinity with the project and the people in it, and gave evaluators first-hand insight into the (potential) involvement of these officials - an issue that was part of the ToRs.

**Box 2. Changes as a Result of PE in Zimbabwe**

At community level:
- With additional funding from the Dutch Embassy, CARE is fulfilling community demands for increased dam capacity and other improvements at all 12 project sites; CARE is also piloting a wider range of dam-related income-generating activities, following the evaluation's recommendations.

At field level:
- Methods used during the PE - notably social mapping - are now routinely incorporated into the planning and extension process at all dam sites.

At field-office level:
- The CARE fieldstaff member who distinguished herself during the PE was appointed as a training officer and will be trained further in participatory techniques.
- All CARE fieldstaff will undergo training in participatory approaches.

At programme level:
- The PE findings helped to re-think and refine the design of similar CARE-implemented projects funded by other donors.
- CARE took the PE report's remark that *'all projects learn, but good projects learn faster'* seriously and is now set to incorporate continuously the lessons generated by its various project models. For example:
- The approach taken to monitor a similar but much larger CARE project funded by DfID was adapted to incorporate the PE findings and recommendations.
- CARE used the PE findings and methodology to help (participatory) research institutions working on common-property management to refine their research questions, with CARE dam sites being used for action-oriented research on best models.

Outside the programme:
- The PE team had invited project staff of another Dutch funded dam rehabilitation project in Zimbabwe to witness the community-level workshops. This contributed to improved professional and social linkages between the two projects. Now, one year later, the invitation is being returned and CARE staff are participating in the other project's review.

Other spin-offs were reported by the country programme officer nine months after the evaluation (K. Stevenson, pers. comm.). The PE tackled only a limited number of issues, but was designed to speak with authority on these. It thus gave CARE insight into the validity of key assumptions underlying project design. This eventually led to thorough revision of routine approaches where the PE proved the assumptions untenable. Unlike preceding evaluation reports, the PE report was critical - and this was not taken lightly at CARE headquarters. Generally though, the report was perceived as constructive, thought-provoking and sound. It motivated CARE to '*frankly and thoroughly dissect its approaches*' and accept that, in the difficult field of common-property management, best models can be developed only by trial and error.

Changes as a result of the PE came at different levels (Box 2). Some were already in the making at the time of the PE, but the PE's outcome reinforced or shifted their emphasis.

## Dimensions of Participation in the Sudan

Unlike the PE of the small dams in Zimbabwe, the Sudan team needed to assess a wide range of activities. The ACORD-supported Red Sea Hills Programme (RSHP) in Eastern Sudan promotes community organisational development among Beja agropastoralists. Over 15 different types of activities, chosen by the Beja communities, are planned, implemented and monitored by them through the locally-elected Village Development Committees (VDCs). These activities include goat restocking, well repair and boat rehabilitation (many pastoralists whose herds were depleted by drought have now taken up sea-going activities).

The main aim of the evaluation was to provide a learning opportunity at community and project levels, in keeping with the new participatory approach the project had adopted two years previously. The initial ToRs were worked out by the RSHP team in discussion with the VDCs with which the project was working, and were then discussed with the ACORD country officer in Khartoum and the regional desk officer in London. There was substantial agreement, but the desk officer put considerable work into framing the ToRs so that they reflected the original programme document. Higher-level staff in London added a few points, such as a request to examine the cost-effectiveness of selected project activities.

The RSHP team and the VDCs designed the evaluation and decided it should be participatory in approach. They even suggested specific PRA methods, since they were already using them for their internal monitoring and evaluation. Unlike the Zimbabwe case, the external members of the evaluation team were from outside the country, and were contacted only a few weeks before the evaluation took place, giving them less time to prepare. On their arrival in the Sudan, the two external consultants and two members of the RSHP team (who had been selected by that team)

spent two days reviewing the ToRs, transforming each statement into a question and brainstorming how each question could best be addressed together with the villagers. They agreed on certain participatory methods that they would propose to the villagers, some known to the villagers and team and some new. It became obvious that the RSHP team expected that being involved in the evaluation would also be an opportunity to learn new methods and skills.

## Visualisation on the spot

Four villages were selected by the RSHP team to represent successful and less successful community development in the coastal and inland area, respectively. In the initial community meetings, the villagers themselves chose which project activities should be evaluated in more detail: the three most important activities in the eyes of the women and the men, respectively. In most cases, there was some overlap of the two sets of three.

Because activities to evaluate were chosen only after arriving at the villages, pictures showing potential benefits of particular activities could not be prepared beforehand, as was possible in Zimbabwe. The only items that the team brought with them were sheets of white paper, different-coloured felt pens and two small bags of beans (red and white, to allow gender differentiation in voting). The participatory methods chosen included proportional piling, ranking, historical matrices, Venn diagramming, SWOT analyses and a visualised form of community self-assessment based on Uphoff (1991). The methods and process are described in Pantuliano (1998).

Each village evaluation culminated in a feedback workshop in which the Beja-speaking members of the team, including the co-evaluators from the village itself, displayed the results, received comments and posed questions to advance debate in the village, particularly about institutional development. Here, the non-Beja speakers (the external evaluators) were completely dependent on notes taken by the other team members.

## Mixing different levels of participation

As in Zimbabwe, the Sudan case shows that the divisions between low, medium and higher end-user participation in evaluation are not so clear-cut as in Table 1. According to the dimensions of a PE outlined there, the Sudan evaluation was a mixture of different levels of participation:

- **Initiator.** The evaluation in Sudan tried to serve three groups of stakeholders directly (implementing agency, programme and villagers) and indirectly a fourth (donors).

- **Purpose.** It was meant 1) to help the programme and VDCs improve their strategy,

based on villagers' views; 2) to justify funding, i.e. assist decision-making by donors; and 3) to give an opportunity to learn new evaluation methods

- **Questionmakers.** The initial questions for the ToRs were set by both the end-users and the implementing agency. However, the latter's questions about cost effectiveness could not, in the end, be answered, as insufficient quantitative data were available.

- **Methods.** Primarily qualitative methods were used, although the results were quantified through voting by men and women villagers, as well as in proportional piling, e.g. to classify beneficiaries according to wealth status.

- **Outcome.** Data analysis was on several levels: village evaluators were involved in analysis at village level (preparation and implementation of the feedback workshop) while the RSHP team was involved at programme level (discussing and comparing the different village findings and preparing the draft evaluation report). Neither group was involved when the external evaluators took a step back to regard the functioning and technical expertise of the RSHP team. However, the latter had the opportunity to comment on this judgement, as a revised draft of the report was sent to RSHP and to ACORD headquarters. A report in Arabic, with drawings, went back to the villagers, accompanied by a cassette in Beja for the illiterate; and the final evaluation report in English went to the programme team, the implementing agency and the donors. It remains to be seen how these forms of feedback influenced the decision-making of these various stakeholders.

As in Zimbabwe, the PE in the Sudan benefited from talented local collaborators and acceptance by the commissioning agency ACORD to limit the scope of the evaluation. The PE in the Sudan would have been impossible without the participatory experience and skills of the RSHP and village members of the evaluation team. ACORD itself was keen to learn from the evaluation process and sent someone from the London office to observe and document it (Pantuliano, 1998).

## Strengths

The participatory approach allowed the local people's views, both positive and negative, to come through strongly. It was quite easy to enter into discussions about both the strengths and weaknesses of the village development activities and of the RSHP support to them. The village members of the evaluation team also learned some new evaluation methods to apply in their future work.

The visual methods helped to involve everyone in the discussion groups in each village. Drawings made on the spot were useful starting points for exploring the advantages and disadvantages of the various development activities. Each person had a chance to vote on the relative value of the different advantages and, if he or she

wished, to explain the choices. This allowed the evaluation team to gain broader views than by speaking with only the spokesmen of each village.

The RSHP team found the evaluation to be a learning experience that contributed to the programme's own methods and findings in monitoring and evaluation. In ACORD headquarters, the desk officer regarded the evaluation as *'a very interesting case study in what participatory evaluation allows you to do and what it does not'* (John Plastow, pers. comm.).

## Weaknesses

The large variety of development activities exceeded the expertise of the two external consultants. Here, they encountered the same problems as the RSHP team itself, which is trying to support the diverse activities that Beja villagers have chosen to carry out. It was impossible to be experts in everything ranging from livestock predator control to sea-based crafts, and local institutional development is impossible. In those sectors in which the external consultants had some expertise, it was evident that the villagers and RSHP needed additional technical advice.

Only a small part of the project area could be covered during the PE. The settlements are small and dispersed, roads extremely poor and rapid travel impossible. It was therefore difficult in the short time of the PE (three weeks) to meet with large numbers of Beja people to get the views of a wide cross-section of the population. The process of planning the evaluation in each village with people appointed by village assemblies took time, and restricted the number of villages that could be covered. A PE in an area of low population density either has to be planned for a longer period of time or has to be implemented - at least partially - without expensive external consultants.

It was difficult for the evaluators to involve non-beneficiaries of the project, particularly non-Beja groups such as the Rashaida camel-keepers, who use the same natural resources. Furthermore, in the villages, the contacts were by way of the VDCs, the composition of which reflects largely the power structure within the community - with some important adjustments, such as the creation of women's or joint development committees that give women a new public voice.

A major weakness of the Sudan PE was that no initial basic conventional data collection had been done by either the evaluators or the programme itself, making the evaluation largely dependent on villagers' perceptions and opinions.

# Enhancing the Benefits of Participatory Evaluations

These experiences have shown that PE should be used selectively, for specific reasons. It can contribute to the process of community development and institution-building, and provide valuable insights to project staff and funders. Nevertheless, more conventional data collection approaches must not be overlooked. However much the project team and beneficiaries are involved, there will always be issues and angles that are unknown to them. Unlike the Zimbabwe case, where evaluators could study all reports beforehand at leisure, the PE in Sudan did not allow for detailed study of project documents, as travel and intensive interaction with project beneficiaries consumed almost all available time.

The two cases presented here demonstrate that PE is most suitable for collecting the following types of data:

- weighed and gender-specific community opinions on benefits and impacts of activities, on access to and use of benefits, and on sensitive issues such as equity and gender
- approximate information on local living conditions (numbers and quality of physical infrastructure and facilities; location and use of resources; number of users)
- community opinion on performance of project and other institutions meant to serve them
- community opinion on factors determining common property management
- implicitly, the likelihood of continuation of project activities after withdrawal of the implementing agency.

But if PE is to be effective for these purposes, certain steps are needed to maximise its benefits.

## Allowing enough time

The amount of time available for the evaluation can influence the validity of the results. When external consultants are involved, the PE must usually be limited to a few weeks. Because of these time constraints, PE teams may work with only small numbers in the community which may represent non-random samples of the total target group. For some issues, the sample of communities (five in Zimbabwe, four in the Sudan) would be too small to draw truly representative conclusions. A participatory approach that involves the beneficiaries in designing the evaluation may lead to exclusion of certain groups of resource users in the project area.

In Zimbabwe, the community-level workshops were designed for parallel groups (for example, dam committee members and regular dam users) tackling different issues, so as to cover more ground quickly and to enable triangulation between the different groups. Making one group's output the input for the other increased the workshop's momentum. However, the facilitators must be well prepared for such sessions. In the Zimbabwe experience, one 4-5 hour session starting around mid-morning, followed by a joint meal (provided by the guests) proved to be a good middle way that left everyone fulfilled - those who needed and obtained information, and those who could then return to the survival business of the day.

## Careful consideration of the ToRs

When planning and carrying out an evaluation, the results must address the ToRs. However, the different stakeholders (funders, implementing agency, intended beneficiaries) have different interests, and these differences cannot be negated. Even within the different stakeholder groups, interests are not uniform. There may be differences of opinion between various departments and desks within the funding agency, the implementing agency and amongst different community groups. Moreover, the donors usually have priorities, such as poverty alleviation, gender equity or sustainable use of natural resources, which may not be top priorities of the people representing local communities.

External evaluators must therefore use their judgement in agreeing to ToRs and in selecting issues to be explored in a participatory way. It is possible to limit the number of issues covered, but this requires openness and mutual respect between evaluators and those responsible for the ToRs. Lack of time pressure also has a positive effect: the fact that in Zimbabwe the evaluators were all local residents allowed for a prolonged period of decision-making on ToRs and study design. Box 3 provides some guidelines for how ToRs can help maximise the quality and benefits of participatory evaluation.

## Finding the Common Ground

From these experiences, we feel an assessment of what does or does not constitute 'participation' in evaluation should be more open-minded. In our opinion, a review is participatory when it is designed with integrity as a learning experience for all those concerned. For this, a key requirement is that the review focuses on issues of common interest.

In the Zimbabwe case, this was a balancing act between, on the one hand, the questions the evaluators had been set to answer and, on the other hand, their eagerness to make the experience a positive one for the communities concerned. In the Sudan case, the target population took part in defining the review issues. But there were still issues added from the top, such as the cost-benefit analyses demanded by ACORD headquarters.

**Box 3. Terms that create space for participatory evaluation**

- ToRs must be clear enough for decisions to be made about which issues merit a participatory methodology and community-level fieldwork and which would suit conventional evaluation methods.
- ToRs must demand an evaluation design that creates a learning opportunity for the different stakeholders
.
- ToRs should reflect a common denominator of priority concerns, and should be feasible.
- ToRs for PEs thus require discussion and negotiation to match the design of the evaluation with the expectations of the various stakeholders, including the external consultants. For example, assessment of quantitative, particularly economic data, is not feasible if collection and interpretation of such data is not part of an existing monitoring procedure.
- Discussion and negotiation of the ToRs require the time and attention of all concerned.
- Allowance must be made for familiarising fieldstaff with participatory tools and methods.

There must be consensus on how to limit the issues studied. Failing this, evaluators risk criticism from donors for not giving the full picture in their report, or from end-users for wasting their time on unimportant matters. The issues identified by the different stakeholders reveal their priority concerns to the others, helping to change perspectives and priorities. For example, in Zimbabwe the hypotheses about common property management attracted much attention, both from project staff and end-users. Never before had they considered the future of their dams in such a hands-on and visual way. In Sudan, the concerns of the evaluators and the commissioning agency about environmental impact stimulated lively village discussion about predator control.

# Conclusions

The agenda and timespan of external evaluations are virtually always decided primarily by those who pay and those who implement. Yet within these boundaries there is a considerable amount of 'creative space' offering opportunities for community participation, thereby enhancing ownership, authority and follow-up of the findings. Participatory evaluations also offer a unique opportunity for implementing agencies to develop their own capacities in planning, evaluating and implementing projects. Although there was no formal follow-up of the outcome of the participatory evaluations, action such as that reported by CARE (Box 2) demonstrates how par-

ticipatory evaluations have an ethical edge over participatory studies that do not have the means, or the intention, to translate into concrete action at community level.

However, the view that communities (or beneficiaries) must be the sole focus to make an evaluation 'participatory' is untenable. All evaluations need to serve the interests of various stakeholders, although this varies according to the evaluation's main aims. Similarly, a false dichotomy has been set up between conventional and participatory methods. Each has its particular merits and purposes, and they can be used in combination or in sequence. However, participatory methods at community level are time- and labour-intensive and therefore have a substantial opportunity cost.

Reasons for taking communities as the main reference point of an evaluation differ from one project to another and depend on the evaluation's main purpose, as illustrated in this paper.

The Zimbabwe project needed community level lessons on specific and pre-defined issues. The fact that project staff appreciated the review's design and took the review as a learning opportunity appeared a mere 'bonus' at the time. With hindsight, however, staff's response was vital for ensuring that follow-up action was taken on the evaluation's lessons. The Zimbabwe case thus shows that a focus on beneficiaries can increase the relevance of external evaluations for a wide range of stakeholders. The Sudan review, on the other hand, was primarily designed as a learning experience for communities and project staff, and had no pre-defined agenda. The results were useful mostly at the local level, as foreseen. The Sudan case suggests that an exclusive focus on beneficiary participation limits the extent to which legitimate questions of other stakeholders, such as implementing agencies and donors, can be answered. Taken together, the two cases demonstrate that 'true' participation cannot be neatly captured in a one-for-all format.

In conclusion, we would make the following observations:

- The term 'participatory evaluation' may be broadened to include participation not only of communities, but also of an appropriate range of other stakeholders such as project staff, local authorities and funding agencies.

- The optimal mix of participation of communities, other stakeholders and external experts in evaluation must be considered for each specific case, and will depend on the review's purpose and the project's history, complexity and institutional setting.

- Likewise, the optimal mix of participatory and conventional methods should be decided by the questions the review is addressing.

- PEs are more challenging and time-consuming than conventional evaluations; the higher costs should be justified by the comparative advantages they offer.

- There should be clarity and consensus on the implications of a PE for coverage of conventional evaluation topics; evaluators must consider and negotiate terms of reference with care and avoid the impression that they can do an in-depth participatory study as well as deliver a conventional wide ranging review report.

- Preconditions for successful PEs include availability of competent and motivated field staff with an eye for detail; focus on a limited number of issues of common interest to stakeholders concerned (e.g. communities, funders, implementing agency); and sufficient funding to enable careful preparation of field sessions.

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