8

Participatory self-evaluation of World Neighbors, Burkina Faso

Paul Bandre

- ## Introduction

World Neighbors (WN) is an international grassroots development organisation working in Asia, Africa and Latin America to help marginalised communities address their needs. World Neighbours (WN) in West Africa works in Mali, Togo, Ghana and Burkina Faso. Key areas of work are in accordance with community expressed needs, however program priorities include: sustainable agriculture, environmental regeneration, and community health. WN aims to strengthen the capacities of marginalised communities so that they can pursue more autonomous sustainable development. To achieve this, key capacities have been identified by villagers and the WN staff as prerequisites for a sustainable self-promotion process. These are: the capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate, mobilise financial and material resources locally, and negotiate with technical and financial partners.

After several years of working to strengthen these capacities, WN saw growth in autonomous initiatives and a progressive phasing out of WN in community efforts. From an externally-initiated programme, the programme had become a collaboratively managed effort, including joint planning and budgeting, and self-evaluation. In the transition, roles and responsibilities have shifted from WN to local people and local organisations. The self evaluation, which is the focus of this article, was motivated by concerns as to whether programmes and activities are implemented in ways that improve the livelihoods of the target population.

This article discusses the participatory self-evaluation process in Liptougou, which is part of one of the most remote and deprived districts where WN has been working for the last 10 years. The evaluation process was undertaken with an association 'TORIM-MANI', which encompasses 14 villages in the Liptougou Department. It shows how monitoring, evaluation and participatory programming can be integrated into the overall intervention strategy of the Liptougou WN Programme. The self-evaluation coincided with the end of the 1994 - 1997 three year programme. This article describes briefly our annual evaluation process and the more recent tri-annual evaluation process which coincides with the end of each three year programme.

The annual self-evaluation process in Liptougou

Liptougou is a dry zone that often experiences food deficits. The WN programme therefore started by distributing improved seed adapted to the low local rainfall. But before using these seeds on a large scale, farmers tested them on small plots of land to see how they would perform when compared with local varieties. Village organisations set up experimentation and dissemination committees, which received technical training to conduct the trials efficiently. From this small beginning, other committees have developed to include a range of development initiatives, including maternal and child health, literacy, etc..

At the end of each year, the villagers who are part of the different committees, hold local and inter-village meetings to assess the extent to which plans have been implemented and make a programme for the following year. At the

1

village level, each Activity Committee presents its results, more or less as follows:

- summary of annual objectives pursued;
- degree of satisfaction with objectives;
- summary of planned activities;
- degree to which activities were implemented;
- difficulties and constraints encountered; and,
- suggestions.

The summary of objectives and activities are usually presented by the secretaries of the different committees, who are all literate and have access to the related documentation. The assessment of the extent to which activities and objectives have been realised is based on indicators that have been identified and formulated by the villagers. For example, indicators related to the 'strengthening of agricultural systems' include 'increase in number of families who have adopted new technologies', 'increase in income', and 'reduction in number of households affected by hunger'.

Villagers use a simple matrix, and a scale of 1 to 5, to indicate the extent to which activities have been achieved (see Figure 1). They choose their own way to symbolise the score, so that it is understood by all, irrespective of their degree of literacy. For example, in the village of Bambilaré, villagers chose to use bricks of different sizes: the heaviest brick represents 5 and the smallest, lightest brick represents a score of 1. Before allocating a score, villagers discuss each indicator for each

activity. The higher the score, the more the plans have been carried out. Then they discuss the overall findings using several questions:

- Why have they attributed that value?
- Is it satisfactory?
- If not, why not?
- What were the constraints and what could be done to improve the score?

The debate that is provoked by the questions is intense and demonstrates an extraordinary capacity amongst the villagers for making a rational judgement of progress and elaborating the next year's development programme. At the end of the matrix, the villagers identify which activities were unsatisfactorily implemented, or not implemented, and set themselves new scores to aim for in the next year. This then leads to a plan of action to achieve better results.

Another aspect of the evaluation takes place at an inter-village session, organised in a rotation system by a host village. In addition to the committee members, each village sends two representatives, who present a summary of the results for their village derived from the matrix described above. The villagers nominate their two representatives depending on their dynamism and involvement in, and commitment to, programme activities. They must, however, be literate. This process encourages wider participation of villagers in evaluating and planning village activities, thereby allowing the views of different social groups to be incorporated in the plans.

Figure 1. Villagers' matrix showing extent to which activities have been achieved

Planned Activities	Indicators (related to each activity)	1	2	3	4	5
A1	A1.1 A1.2 A1.3					
A2	A2.1 A2.2 A2.3					
A3	etc.					

_____

Large-scale participatory evaluation of programme impact

In 1997 the annual evaluations were complemented by a participatory evaluation of the tri-annual plan that aims to measure the programme's impact in improving the level of villagers' well-being. This process involved the villagers, village and inter-village association leaders, technical WN staff, and external resource people. The process lasted about two months and was organised as follows:

- Technical preparation - elaboration of terms of references, selection of village samples, taking steps to ensure data reliability (1 week);
- Data collection and piloting (4 weeks);
- Analysis/Synthesis of data (2 weeks); and,
- General process management (1 week).

Terms of reference (TORs)

The technical team discussed with the villagers what the main focus of the evaluation should be and the themes with which it should deal. This took place during a meeting of the village association leaders. These views were then used by WN staff to draft the TOR, which were then presented back to the village leaders for amendments before final approval. The TORSs included: objectives, sequence of different stages, expected results, and time frame for implementation. The different needs of the various parties were taken into consideration, resulting in a common vision for the evaluation methodology.

Establishing the village sample

As the Liptougou programme covers 14 villages, a sample was chosen for the evaluation. This was based on criteria of self-promotion established by the committees in village meetings, enabling the evaluation to incorporate local perceptions of 'self-promotion'. The villages were divided into two groups based on the level of self-promotion:

A. Villages strong in self-promotion
- self-sufficiency in household food requirements;
- presence of a spirit of collective initiative in the village;
- agreement between families and social cohesion;
- access to innovations (agriculture, health, literacy etc.);
- existence of a functioning local organisation; and,
- mobilisation and participation of different social groups (women, men, worse-off, better-off, etc.) in the implementation of village development activities.

B. Villages weak in self-promotion
- absence of mobilisation of human and financial resources;
- tendency to focus on individual interests and work;
- lack of energy and community consensus caused by a mentality of continual dependence;
- little openness to innovations and progress; and,
- lack of community activities.

Four villages were chosen, two that were strong in self-promotion and two that were weak. For selecting these villages, the representatives of TORIM-MANI ranked all fourteen villages using the above criteria and chose the two strongest and two weakest villages.

Ensuring reliability of findings

As the merits of any evaluation depend strongly on the reliability of the collected information, the team considered various ways to minimise sources of bias and ensure good quality data. First, the choice of data collectors in the villages was critical as they were responsible for ensuring that the necessary information was collected. These people were chosen by the village leaders based on the type of information required, and comprised groups of 5 to 15 people representing women and men, different neighbourhoods and different households. To have reliable data, it was crucial to include local resource people with expertise on or skills related to the issues being evaluated and with a certain local status/responsibility.

Second, working with external resource people allowed WN to achieve greater objectivity in

_____ 3

_____

data collection and analysis. The resource people had the advantage of an 'outsiders' view' and the impartiality of being outside the process. The resource people came from other NGOs, projects, and government agencies operating in the programme zone, and therefore have knowledge of local realities.

Third, the results were repeatedly triangulated throughout the process. This involved ensuring that the same type of information was collected from different sources, and that different methods were used to collect the same type of information. This allowed a comparison of the findings from different sources and enabled the reliability of the data to be verified.

Where data were contradictory, discrepancies were discussed publicly to allow the villagers themselves to decide which view best reflected their reality. For example, to assess the impact of the WN programme on improving agricultural production, focus groups of women, men, and youth were conducted separately. Each group presented their findings in public. Where conclusions were not unanimously supported, intense debates ensued. This allowed for the correction and addition of information until a consensus view was reached.

In other cases, several methods were used with the same focus group to verify the information. For example, to assess the role of WN in disseminating a specific health innovation, the first method used was a Venn diagram that analysed which external organisations worked in the village and how they interacted. If the innovation was not mentioned in this exercise, yet it appeared as a significant change in semi-structured interviews about the village health situation, then this contradiction became the focus of other complementary exercises and discussions until the situation was clarified.

Collecting and preliminary analysis of field data

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a range of well known participatory methods. These were devised and tested by the technical team. Village leaders were trained during preparatory sessions to conduct their own evaluation with support

from the evaluation facilitators. From the first preparatory sessions, village leaders formed focus groups that were used throughout for discussions. The villagers themselves used the methods, thus reinforcing their analytical capacity and active participation in the evaluation process.

One of the methods used was a household census which assessed the demographic composition of households and formed the basis for assessing the extent of dissemination of different innovations promoted via the WN programme. For each household, knowledgeable villagers indicated the number of members in terms of age and sex. This gave village leaders an update of village population, according to sex and neighbourhood, before assessing who were direct and indirect beneficiaries of the development programme. It was also useful to estimate the amount of available household labour and how this influenced a household's capacity to adopt specific innovations.

Another method used was matrix scoring of the level of participation of various social groups (women, men, worse-off, better-off, etc.) in each activity. Conducting their own survey about innovation adoption enabled the villagers to identify technologies newly introduced into the village and why these were accepted or rejected. By also identifying the source of the innovation, they were able to assess the specific contributions of different organisations and their overall impact on the village.

More qualitative evaluation methods included the 'history of self-promotion', which is an analysis of the changes in local institutions and village organisation that generated activities addressing communal interests. This involved listing all the activities, initiatives or salient events that describe the history of local action in self-promotion. These were then classified according to whether they were a result of local initiatives or driven by external organisations. During the discussions, villagers were able to analyse the weaknesses and strengths of their own efforts.

_____ 4

_____

Feeding back and further analysis of field data

Feedback sessions were held immediately after each exercise. However, an overall feedback session was organised for different groups to explain their findings. The results of each exercise and discussion were presented in plenary to the rest of the village. This was facilitated by a village leader. Each evaluation method was also explained. This feedback session provoked long discussions and exchanges between the villagers, allowing further analysis of the initial findings and amendment and additions to the information that was considered incorrect or incomplete.

Synthesis and interpretation of findings

Analysis and interpretation was carried out at different levels to involve all the social groups in the WN programme area, including both village and inter-village sessions. In the village sessions, the whole village (men, women, the youth, the old, children) gathered for one day. For the inter-village sessions, representatives from the different villages (according to geographic area, gender ethnicity) attended a one day meeting. Both sessions had similar formats, with TORIM-MANI leaders presenting the results in both village and inter-village sessions.

First, the general context was presented: the physical environment and socio-cultural and organisational characteristics, followed by a summary of problems and programme aims. To determine whether programme interventions had resolved identified problems, each activity was analysed in terms of positive or negative impacts on local living conditions. Several variables were used to assess programme impact: types of changes in agricultural production, level of gender equity amongst programme beneficiaries, strengthening of local technical capacity, degree of participation of various social groups in programme implementation, etc..

Following a presentation of general trends, a series of questions guided these discussions:

- What are the main findings?
- What are the highlights and weaknesses of these results?

- What are the causes of this?
- What can be done to improve the limitations?

These questions enabled the groups to assess the overall results critically and link them to activities that would need to be included in a new development plan.

General feedback

An overall feedback was organised by the leaders of the inter-village association TORIM-MANI for all the villagers in the intervention area. Village representatives gathered in feedback sessions which were organised per geographic zone. The presentation was carried out by the TORIM-MANI leaders. However, the WN technical team first chose the key results that would allow trends in the programme's impact to be assessed. These results were first presented by the TORIM-MANI leaders, using visual aids. This stage allowed the leaders to familiarise themselves with different visual aids and with ways of presenting the results, such as percentages and rates of adoption of technical innovation.

This session provoked considerable discussion, enriched the analysis and provide a means to check, once again, whether findings were reliable. The discussions ended with recommendations by the communities for improving the WN programme. These are serving as the basis for the new activity programme.

• Lessons and prospects

The findings of the WN evaluation show how its development approach has increased local self-confidence, leading to greater self-initiated development based on local strengths. For example, villagers are doing research on drought-resistant seeds for government agricultural departments and other neighbouring villages. Other initiatives related to health no longer require intense inputs from the WN team. Also, due to the transfer of tasks and responsibilities by the WN team, through technical training and study trips, TORIM-MANI has become more autonomous financially, administratively, and technically. Literacy has enabled some leaders to develop

_____

their own programme of activities, report on various meetings, and monitor activities.

However, we encountered several problems with this participatory evaluation process. High levels of illiteracy, while partly overcome by the extensive use of visual methods, were still an issue as some writing was necessary. Also, the translation into local languages of certain fundamental concepts of participatory monitoring and evaluation was difficult. This sometimes hampered communication between villagers and the evaluation team, who did not always speak the local language.

For example, at the beginning, several meetings of the WN team were necessary to find good translations for terms such as 'objective', 'aim', 'indicator', 'matrix' and 'adoption rate'. If these key terms are not clarified, then data biases can occur raising doubts about the reliability of the findings.

Nevertheless, the participatory evaluation process met its objectives, which can be partly attributed to the overall participatory development strategy of WN but also to the interest of village organisations and members in investing in this process. Participatory monitoring and evaluation of the Liptougou programme was a dynamic process of reflection and analysis that started simply, and slowly developed more elaborate methods of collection and analysis. It gave responsibility to local people to identify and analyse their potential and limitations, and to plan and implement their own development. It contributed to increasing the capacity of local village organisations to define and carry out their own evaluations, thus reinforcing WN's self-help approach to development.

- **Paul Bandre,** Voisins Mondiaux (World Neighbours), 01 B.P. 1315 Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.