Uncovering the mysteries of inclusion: Empirical and methodological possibilities in participatory evaluation in an international context

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

The inclusion of stakeholders in participatory evaluation in highly diverse, culturally complex settings remains a challenge, given issues of inequity, power, voice, capacity and skill. These challenges are well documented, but there is a relative absence of papers devoted to addressing them based on examples and evidence. In this paper, we report our review of 51 empirical studies of participatory evaluations conducted in the international domain, focusing on the methods of inclusion used in the evaluations. Our findings address “the who” (which stakeholders are included and which excluded), “the why” (rationales for participation) and “the how” (by what means and in what manner) of inclusion. We were struck by the scale of some development programs, geographically and in terms of the number of diverse program sponsors and stakeholders, and how this necessitated highly creative, innovative participatory techniques to ensure that anyone (and in some cases everyone) could have a voice in the process, regardless of location, language ability, privilege, power, gender, age or culture.

1. Introduction

“Methodological diversity is an enabling condition for creativity” (Van Mele & Braun, 2005, as cited in Chambers, 2007 p. 23).

Numerous approaches and methods associated with participatory or collaborative evaluation have emerged over the past three decades (e.g., participatory action research, participatory monitoring and evaluation, transformative evaluation, stakeholder based evaluation), with significant mixing and blending based on rationale, contextual specificity, programmatic emphasis and political orientation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). The literature also describes a continuum of participation along eight dimensions, from tokenism to partnership and citizen—or stakeholder—control (see Arstein, 1969), highlighting the "kaleidoscopic" nature of participation (White, Nair, & Ascroft, 1994), as it transforms and changes shape, from one program, evaluation context and evaluator to the next. In common among all approaches is the engagement of stakeholders (albeit to varying degrees) in the evaluation process, moving well beyond the role of data provider to becoming active partners and collaborators in co-producing evaluative knowledge. A key to the success of this partnership is that evaluators and stakeholders each bring a specific focus to the evaluation; with evaluators it is their knowledge of the evaluation process and standards of practice, and with stakeholders their knowledge of the program and community context. The participatory process varies widely based on the depth and extent of stakeholder involvement, the diversity among stakeholders (e.g., from program managers to program beneficiaries), and the level of evaluator control over the process (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998).

Participation can thus be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the program and community context, the stakeholders involved, the evaluation purpose and client interests, and the evaluator’s own position and values stance. As Oakley (1991) has stated, the “process of participation is not a science” (p. 270), and as such cannot be operationalized in a predetermined or predictable way. In terms of methods, the participatory evaluation literature has always remained vague (Hall, 1992), with evaluators presented, for example, as “creative pluralists” (Chambers, 2007 p. 23) who invent and improvise participatory methods and techniques to meet particular contextual, community and sectoral needs. As Freedman (1998) has noted, collaborative approaches require “treading a fine line” (p. 28) between adopting predefined procedures and then adapting them based on the capacities of the stakeholders involved and their learning and information needs (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). Others highlight the inherent contradiction between two conflicting narratives, between the social justice aspirations of participatory practice and the...
methodological demands of an evidence-based practice agenda (Eyben, Guijt, Roche, & Shutt, 2015), a dynamic that Chinyowa (2011) likens to “walking on a tight rope” (p. 353). For others, participation is considered to be a multidimensional, dynamic process that cannot be understood outside of its social, cultural, and institutional context (Trickett & Ryerson-Espino, 2004), what Kelly (2006) would refer to as its “local ecology” (p. 113). Participation is thus considered a complex, deeply pedagogical, political process (Eversole, 2005; Oakley, 1991), as epistemological and cultural differences, and issues of power, economics, voice, capacity and skill, magnify the challenging dynamics of collaborative practice.

Participatory processes can range across a continuum of evaluation activities; however, the needs of the program and community context, the nature and depth of participation, the lack of evaluation knowledge or research skills among participants, and inequities related to power and privilege among participants, can present significant practical obstacles to successful collaborations (Cartland, Ruch-Ross, Mason, & Donohue, 2008; Lennie, 2005; Oakley, 1991). These challenges are well documented, but as Trickett and Espino (2004) have noted about the large body of literature on collaboration, there is a “relatively absence of papers specifically devoted to discussions or examples of how to prepare individuals for collaborative work” (p. 56, emphasis added). Their position is validated by others, such as House and Howe (2000), Oakley (1991), Taut (2008), and Titter and McCallum (2006).

We thus turned to a review of the empirical literature in the context of international development evaluation to explore the ways in which stakeholders are included in collaborative work. We selected the international development domain as we wanted to focus our review on highly diverse, culturally complex program and community settings, expecting to locate among our selected studies creative approaches to the inclusion of stakeholders. We were also motivated by the pioneering work of Robert Chambers in East Africa and South Asia with Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques, where the use of innovative and highly creative approaches are used to ensure the inclusion of community stakeholders (e.g., see Chambers, 2003).

We selected for review 51 empirical studies of participatory/collaborative evaluations conducted in international development contexts between 2000 and 2015, all of which are narrative reflections based on experiences with participatory evaluations in international development contexts. Our focus was on the inclusion of stakeholders as participants in evaluation activities, placing emphasis on who on was included, how they were included, and the activities in which they were included. Specific questions guiding our analysis were: How have evaluators responded in practice to key considerations and issues related to inclusion? What does inclusion look like? In practice, what are the methods used to create the spaces for inclusion in participatory evaluations? What are the implications for practice and research in participatory evaluation going forward?

Given cultural, political, economic and linguistic differences, and, more importantly, the privileging of Western methodological practices, we expected to identify a broad range of creative approaches and methods being used to promote stakeholder inclusion. As presented in more detail below, there was indeed considerable discussion in our sample about stakeholder selection and involvement in the studies we reviewed, including striking accounts of highly complex and inventive preparations, arrangements and processes used to garner and ensure participation. At the same time, the explicit use of language associated with notions of “inclusion” was less prevalent than we anticipated. In addition, numerous studies seemed to confuse the involvement of stakeholders as data sources with the idea that evaluation processes were participatory in nature, an error that is not uncommon in the field of participatory evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard 2012). As participatory evaluation in the international setting is a complex endeavor, distinguishable by rationale, contextual specificity, programmatic emphasis and political orientation (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016), methods of inclusion (the how of participation) differed quite significantly across all studies. Our focus on inclusion (who, why, and how) thus also sheds light on practices of exclusion, raising questions about voice, power, politics and privilege, about who gets to speak (and for whom), who is silenced, and whose knowledge is of most value, all of which raises profoundly ethical questions as evaluators make decisions about who is in and who is out.

In what follows, we begin with a discussion of inclusion as an underutilized but important construct related to participatory theory and practice. We then describe our sample of studies and the methods used for analyzing them. The main body of the paper is devoted to the findings about the inclusion of stakeholders in participatory processes, focusing on the ‘why’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ of inclusion. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for theory and practice in participatory evaluation.

1.2. Situating inclusion in participatory practice

Inclusion has been on the radar of the evaluation community for more than three decades (e.g., Chambers, 1994; Greene, 2000; Mertens, 1999, 2009; Pfohl, 1986), with consideration given to moral-political and methodological arguments for including diverse stakeholders through participatory means. According to the Oxford Dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com), the noun “inclusion” was coined in the early 17th century, derived from the Latin verb includere which means “to shut in”. Other standard definitions of inclusion address the “act” of including someone and the “state” of being included within a group or structure (www.oxforddictionaries.com, www.merriam-webster.com). These definitions hinge on the meaning of the verb “to include,” which has such senses as “to have” someone as part of a group and “to make” someone part of something (www.merriam-webster.com). Synonyms for inclusion are “involvement” and “incorporation” and antonyms are “exclusion,” “absence” and “omission” (www.oxforddictionaries.com). These definitions provide preliminary insights as to the significance of inclusion (and exclusion) in the context of theorizing and practicing participatory forms of evaluation. We note, however, they make “inclusion” sound somewhat passive, as if someone is doing the including and the recipients have little agency in the matter. This runs counter to many contemporary notions of inclusion, which emphasize marginalized persons having agency and voice. In the field of evaluation, this approach is represented in, for example, transformative participatory evaluation (); and, from a social science perspective, Fraser and Honneth (2003) address inclusion in a multi-dimensional way, pointing out that it involves recognition, representation, redistribution and rights. We return to these “4Rs” later.

Concerns about inclusion in participatory processes fall into two broad areas, creating a matrix of considerations in the planning, design and implementation of evaluations (see Fig. 1). As with any social science research involving human subjects, those designing and conducting participatory evaluations must define who to include (and thus who to exclude) as data sources. In addition, evaluators pursuing participatory research also have to make decisions about who to include (and thus who to exclude) as active participants in the evaluation team and process, as well as why, how and where in the evaluation cycle to include (or exclude) participants.

Although considerations about inclusion (and exclusion) appear to be fairly clear-cut when represented in matrix form, the diversity (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016) and malleability of approaches used in participatory evaluation can muddy the water. In a recent study of evaluators’ perceptions of stakeholder participation in international development evaluation, Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh (2011) found that a lack of precision and specificity in describing how participatory evaluation was operationalized was problematic. Of note for our purposes here is that the use of qualitative methods (e.g., interviewing, photo-voice) of data collection with stakeholders was frequently seen to be synonymous with their inclusion as active participants in the evaluation process, a misconception also identified in an empirical study of 121
participatory evaluations (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012).

Our understanding of inclusion, of its multifaceted and cultural complexity, is situated within a broad ecological context that is inclusive of the social, economic, political, and cultural forces that historically (and to the present day) influence and shape the local program setting. We invoke Canadian feminist scholar Dorothy Smith (1987) concept of institutional ethnography, as it is a reminder that there are no bounded, closed spaces that remain impervious to external discursive and textual practices. For Smith, people’s everyday world of experience is historically and politically mediated by ruling social, institutional, and cultural relations that originate beyond the boundaries of the day-to-day world. Our understanding of participation and collaborative practice in the international development context, its possibilities and potential, must thus be situated within the ‘developing world’ narrative and history, with processes and practices that remain deeply conditioned by the cultural, political, social, and historical landscape that has prevailed in defining relationships between the North and the South for centuries.

Evaluation itself is also considered a form of cultural authority (House, 1993) that shapes institutional norms and the parameters of working practice. As Danziger (1990) has argued, forms of investigation have to be understood as forms of social organization—they don’t happen outside of our institutions, our social relations, our politics and our economics. In other words, the use of participatory methodologies, no matter how well intentioned, are not methodologically disinterested, but rather are part of the larger development discourse and modernization agenda that currently defines and shapes evaluation practice internationally. Thus we find collaborative approaches coexisting uneasily, as “uncomfortable bedfellows” (Eyben and Guijt, 2015 p.9), alongside more evidence-based evaluation approaches, where accountability, reporting and auditing take precedence over the learning function of evaluation. Our understanding and subsequent analysis of participatory practice is thus meaningfully framed by this broader socio-political, cultural, economic, and historical context that continues to shape and circumscribe practice, including who is selected for inclusion and who is excluded, rationales for practice, and the ways and means used to create and construct inclusive practices.

2. Methods

The focus in this paper is on methods used for the inclusion of stakeholders in participatory approaches to evaluation in the international development community. We located 51 empirical studies for review over a 15 year period (between 2000 and 2015), all of which were reflective case narratives written almost primarily from the evaluator perspective about their experiences with participatory evaluation in international development projects across the Global South. Our analysis was guided by questions concerning the inclusion of stakeholders, with a focus on the why, who and how of inclusionary practice. What follows is a description of our sample and selection process, as well as methods used for analysis.

2.1. Sample description

The 51 studies were drawn from a previous empirical study of evaluations conducted in the international development domain (see Chouinard & Hopson, 2016). From these studies, we selected only those that used a participatory or collaborative evaluation approach. The majority of studies come from English language peer reviewed journals published between 2000 and 2015, with one from an edited book collection (Estrella et al., 2000). The 51 studies report on evaluations located across the Global South, in Africa (n = 22), South East/Asia (n = 12), Latin America (n = 11), Middle East (n = 3), Mexico (n = 1), Caribbean (n = 1), and with some spanning multiple countries. The programs were based in community development (e.g., youth crime prevention, slum improvement, children’s clubs), education (e.g., leader training, e-learning, museum exposition), health (e.g., HIV/AIDS education and prevention, reproductive health, public health intervention), agriculture (e.g., farmers trade union, forest management and conservation, land management), and environmental sectors (e.g., conservation, natural resource management, biodiversity management).

A number of different approaches were encompassed in the sample, including participatory monitoring and evaluation (n = 15), participatory impact evaluation (n = 5), participatory evaluation in practical (P-PE) or transformative (T-PE) modes (n = 19), outcome mapping (n = 3), appreciative inquiry (n = 3), participatory rural appraisal (n = 2), culturally responsive evaluation (n = 2), most significant change (n = 2), and other unique approaches (e.g., process evaluation, participatory action research, case study, democratic deliberative evaluation, stakeholder based evaluation, multi-partner evaluation, utilization focused evaluation, gender based evaluation, sistematizacion). A number of studies also adopted a combination of approaches to address the contingencies of the program and community context (e.g., impact monitoring and participatory evaluation, summative, formative and developmental approaches).

2.2. Analysis

We read the studies multiple times with our research questions in mind, taking detailed notes on the content of the studies and extracting relevant passages related to five pre-determined categories (i.e.,
sample/context; evaluation approach; methodological orientation; inclusion practices and methods; degree of participation). We also wrote memos, which included observations about the characteristics of the information about inclusion and participation contained in the articles (e.g., the nature and extent of explicit and implicit references to inclusion, whether stakeholders mentioned were treated as data sources rather than participants), the overall quality of the studies, and emerging reflections. Using a table with the columns dedicated to our predetermined categories and the rows assigned to each of the studies in our sample, we inserted narrative summaries based on our detailed notes, including direct quotes of relevant passages from the studies. Working independently, we each conducted an initial coding of the data in the table. We then compared our codes and agreed upon a final structure consisting of three overarching codes: “why” (to capture the rationales offered for practices related to inclusion), “who” (to identify which stakeholders were selected for participation), and “how” (to catalogue the means by which inclusion was practiced). We then subjected the data to subsequent coding using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, generating sub-codes within each of the three broader categories. With data organized in this fashion, we derived the themes and related findings discussed below. Throughout this process, we returned as needed to the full text of the studies in our sample to confirm that our understandings and interpretations were reliable and appropriately contextualized.

3. Mapping the parameters of inclusion: a discussion of the empirical literature

Our focus in this paper is on exploring the specifics of participation, the how (by what means and in what manner) participants are included in the participatory process within the international development domain. Before turning to a discussion of the how of inclusion we first situate our understanding through a consideration of the why and who of inclusion, which stakeholders are selected and rationales for inclusion.

3.1. Why: intentionality and inclusion

There are numerous rationales cited in our selected studies for the use of participatory or collaborative approaches in the international domain (e.g., empowerment, capacity building, increased relevance and use of findings, sensitivity to cultural context). We acknowledge that although participation is a negotiated practice, with multiple and diverse stakeholder groups involved in framing and defining the parameters of collaboration, our understanding of intentionality remains limited to the perspectives of those who have provided their narrative accounts in the articles cited. Thus despite the plethora of rationales cited for inclusion, our overall understanding, based on our selected studies, remains partial. Understanding the inquirer’s intentionality (and here we refer to the studies authors), however, signals a particular ethical and moral positioning, an “ethic of engagement” (Schwandt, 2002 p. 202) focused on deep political commitment and an ethos of responsibility. As Heron and Reason (1997) state, the axiological question is “for what purposes do we cocreate reality?” (p. 287). As the studies that we have reviewed would suggest, participatory practice entails a normative, action-oriented approach to the co-construction and co-creation of knowledge, a motivation and political impulse to democratize the inquiry process and better attend to the exigencies of local and national contexts. The principles of ethical practice are effectitively synonymous with the rationale/s and the principles of collaborative practice (Mikesell, Bromely, & Khodyakov, 2013), with a focus on questions of social justice, privilege, voice, equity, and cultural responsiveness. In what follows, we draw from across our sample of selected studies to highlight some of the key rationales cited for inclusion.

Rationales for inclusion varied widely across all studies; however, we discerned a strong, transformative dimension in current development practice, what would seem to be an attempt at reversing institutional practices wedded to technocratic approaches to knowledge construction, and ameliorating persistent inequities in capacity and growth (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). For some, this meant an emphasis on learning and evaluation capacity building (ECB) of local practitioners (Bradley, Mayfield, Mehta, & Rukonge, 2002), local staff (Earl & Carden, 2002), and of the broader evaluation community and international organization/s (McDuff & Jacobson, 2001). For others, capacity building extended to strengthening local institutions (Torres, 2000), a focus on group learning and behavioural change (Fors, Kruse, Taut, & Tenden, 2006) and community capacity building (Ridde, Goossens, & Shaker, 2012).

In the majority of studies, we also noted a consistent theme of re-balancing, restoration and redress, as evaluators struggle to include collaborative practice within an “evidence-based” and accountability-driven evaluation culture prevailing in the international development domain (Kothari, 2001; Reason, 1988). This notion of balance between distinct constructs of learning/development and accountability, either politically, epistemologically, culturally or methodologically, was characterized by Chinyowa (2011) as “walking on a tight rope” (p. 353). As such, there remains a strong sense of addressing the inequities of current (and past) evaluation practice, by including the community in decision making and fostering local ownership of the evaluation process, findings and recommendations (Alzate, 2000; Newman, 2008). For others, balance was characterized as a combination of ownership and accountability (Makgama, 2009), rigour and involvement (Hamilton et al., 2000), empowerment and effectiveness (Kariki & Njuki, 2013), and local knowledge and gender equity (Lawrence, Haylor, Barahona, & Meusch, 2000). Overall, we noted a strong activist and reflexive ethic, with an emphasis on cultural responsiveness (Brandon, Smith, Ofir, & Noordeloos, 2014; Chinyowa, 2011) and an ongoing critique of Western, positivist approaches to knowledge creation (Laperriere, 2006). Participatory and collaborative practices were positioned not as technical solutions but as a political means for addressing social, economic, cultural and historical exigencies of international development practice.

3.2. Who: a nexus of inclusion and exclusion

Despite clear rationales for a commitment to collaboration, the sheer complexity of defining community alongside internal dynamics of difference (e.g., in terms of castes, religions, ethnic groups, tribal associations, languages and voice, etc.) remains a bewildering and often confounding issue in participatory research practice (Cornwall, 2008; Israel et al., 2008). As Gujit and Shaw (1998) point out, “inequalities, oppressive social hierarchies, and discrimination are often overlooked, and enthusiasm generated for the cooperative and harmonious ideal promised by the imagery of ‘community’” (p. 8). Communities are heterogeneous entities defined as much by their differences, not only in terms of composition, but also by their interests and concerns. How community is defined, who represents the community, who speaks for whom, and who is selected for inclusion, thus remain contentious, as implications of inclusion and exclusion directly influences the participatory process (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). As Cornwall & Jewkes (1995a,b); argue, “asking the who question enables us to look more closely at what is meant by participatory research. It focuses attention on the central issues of power and control” (p. 1668). Who initiates the participatory process, whether it comes from the top down or the bottom up, from the funder or from the community, whether stakeholders are selected, volunteer for the task, or are coerced, all has a direct effect on the process and outcomes (Oakley, 1991), and importantly frames the boundaries of action and the knowledge jointly created in the process (Cornwall, 2008; Gujit & Shah, 2001).

The decision about which collaborative approach to select, whether for transformative or pragmatic reasons, which stakeholder groups to include or exclude, is directly related to evaluation rationale (Taut,
2008). Is the purpose tied to social change and intended to foster empowerment or social transformation? Is the goal to promote learning or is it tied to a more pragmatic rationale related to use of findings and decision making? Whose values are represented? Our findings suggest this issue becomes all the more complex in the international development context, as there are numerous stakeholders representing very diverse roles and constituencies (e.g., multiple agencies, donors, beneficiaries, politicians, evaluators, community program managers) (Bamberger, Vaessen, & Raimondo, 2016), all with often competing and contrasting issues, interests and voice. In a survey of international development evaluators, Cullen et al. (2011) found that 77% of evaluators noted that stakeholder selection was somewhat to always challenging. While we note very complex and intricate arrangements involving who is selected for inclusion and what form their inclusion might take in practice (what we refer to as the how of inclusion), what follows is a focused discussion on who is included/excluded, what selection criteria are used, and why. As noted earlier, some authors in our sample mis-took the participation of stakeholders as data sources as representing a form of participatory practice (e.g., Duggan, 2010), though perhaps this is a reflection of the very early stages of what may potentially lead to collaborative practice. The findings presented in this section are derived from the studies where stakeholders participated in some element of the evaluation process (e.g., planning, collecting data) beyond simply serving as data sources. While we note the evaluator was the one who appeared to be responsible for defining selection criteria and implementing selection processes, we were able to identify two specific criteria for inclusion: the recruitment of participants at multiple levels in the social context and gender equity considerations.

### Recruitment at multiple levels of social context

A set of considerations expressed around selection was the goal of recruiting participants at multiple levels in the social context (e.g., Chinyowa, 2011) and in a manner that would provide representation of all those involved or affected by the policy or program being evaluated (e.g., Crishna, 2006). In these cases, technical concerns about data and analytical quality were important influences on selection planning, but political considerations were also evident with evaluators aiming to ensure that not just those with power, authority or the loudest voices would be included. Other considerations included selection criteria based on geographic representation (Brandon et al., 2014), with different stakeholder groups identified at different phases of the evaluation and for different purposes. Cornwall (2014) carried out a stakeholder analysis using an adapted Venn Diagram for institutional and relationship mapping to ensure that everyone would have a voice. Others identified different levels of involvement depending upon stakeholder group (e.g., Abes, 2000), with some breaking stakeholders into primary (Board members) who provide supportive environment and participate in focus groups, secondary stakeholders (coordinators and staff) who help design data collection instruments, and tertiary stakeholders (instructors, students, companies) who attend some evaluation meetings but seem to be mostly data sources (Cornachione, Trombette, & Casa-Nova, 2009).

To address the inclusion of many stakeholder groups across multiple countries, Edge and Marphatia (2015) designed a broad framework for two strands of participatory research: at the international level, evaluators, research partners and national education leaders engaged in practical participatory evaluation, and at the national level, research teams engaged with stakeholders in transformative participatory evaluation. For their part, McDuff and Jacobson (2001) created two levels of training for inclusion: education staff, local teachers and action group committee members were involved in a two-and-a-half day training on participatory evaluation, with key stakeholder groups identified and involved only as data sources (teachers, staff, students, reps from conservation groups, donor organizations, and government). Sidersky and Gujít (2000) involved three key stakeholder groups and farmers in the whole process: annual seminars were used to bring together about 40 farmers to review progress and reassess priorities, 10 were involved in strategic planning, experimentation, data analysis and design of evaluation process; and 80 male and female farmers were involved in activity specific collaboration. Others created “assemblies” (very large groups of stakeholders from multiple communities) who would be responsible for the entire planning and M&E process (Alzate, 2000).

### Gender equity

Regardless of who chooses whom to participate in evaluation teams and processes, we noted that gender equity considerations featured prominently in selection criteria for inclusion. In one example, Bagamoyo College of Arts, Tanzania Theatre Centre, Mabala, & Allen (2002) planned for gender balance in the recruitment of young people to serve as “artist/researchers” in a popular theatre project to educate community members on HIV/AIDS in Tanzania. In another example in the African context, Brandon et al. (2014) discussed how they aimed to recruit female scientists into the evaluation process of an agricultural program because women scientists were vastly under-represented in the agricultural workforce. Gender played a role in selection planning at more granular levels as well, with evaluators holding women only meetings or workshops to ensure women would have a voice in the evaluation findings and processes and a chance to develop their own capabilities (e.g., Crishna, 2006; Kariuki & Njuki, 2013; Symes & Jasser, 2000).

3.3. **How designing innovative approaches for inclusion of all stakeholders**

In this section our focus shifts to the how of inclusion, to the activities and techniques used by evaluators to create spaces for active stakeholder involvement in the evaluation process, what some have referred to as the “missing rungs” (Titter & McCallum, 2006, p. 162) on Arnestein’s ladder. Our selected studies highlight the multi-dimensionality of inclusion, as evaluators and other program stakeholders devise creative and innovative methods to ensure the inclusion of a broad and incredibly diverse range of stakeholders, a challenge that is made all the more acute given the often large number of program sponsors. The studies we selected highlight various points of inclusion throughout the process, with different groups of stakeholders included in different ways, and at different times, depending upon the stakeholder group identified and the rationale advanced for inclusion. Our illustrations of methods used for inclusion standout as examples of inventive and resourceful methods used to ensure that anyone (and in some cases everyone) can have a voice in the process, regardless of language ability, privilege, power or gender.

*Having an inclusive approach in mind*

Previous scholars and practitioners who have promoted inclusion in evaluation have observed the importance of having a general approach or framework in mind for involving program actors and stakeholders (see e.g., Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Greene, 2000; Mertens, 1999; Ryan et al., 1998). In numerous studies in our sample, the question of how to include stakeholders appeared to relate to evaluators’ conceptual mindsets and stances. For example, Botcheva, Shi, and Huffman, 2009 observed a reliance on a “model based on collaboration with primary stakeholders” which, along with recognition of their own cultural biases, was reported to contribute to “fundamental changes in every step of the evaluation process” (p. 177); while, Tapella and Rodriguez-Bilella (2014) said they looked for inclusion across a “broad range” of stakeholder groups, placing emphasis on an in-depth comprehension of processes and shared learning as the development intervention unfolded. Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2015) talked about using a “team approach” and having “sustained stakeholder involvement” throughout the evaluation study. Symes and Jasser (2000) used a “building block approach”, aiming to create an understanding of participation among stakeholders and then to develop appropriate methods, skills and teamwork, with subsequent work focusing on strengthening program monitoring and evaluation, including linkages to organizational processes. Nandi, Nanda, and Jugran (2015) and
Letichevsky and Penna Firme (2012) both reported reliance on “appreciative inquiry” approaches, with the latter authors also incorporating an “empowerment” perspective to “enhance self determination” of stakeholders.

Focusing on governance arrangements and project management processes

Previous researchers, such as Cousins and Whitmore (1998), have pointed out how inclusion is affected by governance arrangements and project management processes, in particular with respect to who gets to have a substantive “say” in strategic decisions and ongoing evaluation activities. In our sample, there were numerous examples of deliberate efforts made to include stakeholders in the governance and management of the evaluation projects. Brandon et al. (2014) reported establishing a 13-member project steering committee based on geographic representation of “key partners” that included an M&E subcommittee to provide advice and guidance on evaluation planning discussions focused on “empowering African stakeholders”. This approach resulted, for example, in the selection and development of 22 African trainers to lead more than two-dozen “training, monitoring, learning” events per year. Edge and Marphatia (2015) reported designing their project governance to “ensure all key national stakeholders were provided opportunities to actively engage in...planning, design, in-country leadership and between country analysis” and to reflect voices of teachers, parents, students who are “rarely included in...policy research frameworks” (p. 49). The project was structured with a project management office (external to the countries under study), international, national and local steering committees, and multi-stakeholder national research teams (including academics, educators, parents, students, and government and union representatives). Some of the management practices reportedly used to foster inclusion across these levels were international cross-country research design workshops, national and international data analysis and validation meetings, discussion forums, dissemination events, and advocacy workshops (Edge & Marphatia, 2015).

Some other examples of evaluators addressing aspects of inclusion through governance and management arrangements were: Forss et al. (2006) who established a task force of representatives from program sectors in the organization being evaluated who worked with the internal evaluation team to plan the evaluation, write the terms of reference for contracting external evaluators, and select the external evaluators; Makgama (2009) who described creating a committee composed of all representatives from all stakeholder groups and holding an introductory workshop to introduce the committee and to formalize its role and structure; Sidersky and Gujit (2000) who reported working to integrate stakeholders from three key groups in a permanent participatory planning process which included annual seminars bringing together 40 local actors to review progress and reassess priorities; and Symes and Jasser (2000) focused in senior management to encourage organizational culture of participation as respondents in the evaluation research.

Inclusion through consultation was a notable feature of governance and management processes in some of the reports in our sample. For instance, Barahona and Wilson (2006) described the use of consultations with various stakeholders at the outset of the evaluation process, reporting that these influenced the research program and tendering process for soliciting expertise. They also described a post-evaluation consultation workshop held for stakeholders (representatives from government departments and donor agencies) in which findings were presented and their meaning debated (Barahona & Wilson, 2006). In other examples, Bradley et al. (2002) mentioned staff being included in defining needs for training and in developing action strategies for quality improvement, Brandon et al. (2014) reported stakeholders being consulted at the outset on a theory of change, outcome mapping, and an M&E framework, and Crishna (2006) described how local women who were not originally included in consultations related to a coalmine project were later included through face-to-face meetings with company and village officials (with the women’s meetings held separately from men’s to offset gendered power dynamics).

Organizing punctual gatherings: meetings, workshops and training events

A wide variety of punctual gatherings such as meetings, workshops, training and train-the-trainer events were reported in the studies in our sample, making these gatherings the most prevalent means for including stakeholders in evaluation processes. Such gatherings were used at various points in the evaluation cycles, with formats ranging from small to large scales, and from a few hours to two weeks in duration. The purposes of such gatherings varied, but their underlying rationales were not generally distinguishable from those known in the participatory evaluation field. Meetings, workshops and events were used for introducing projects and governance structures, project planning, identifying evaluation questions, empowering local actors and stakeholders, developing local capacity and skills, building relationships and trust to foster collaboration, developing consensus and reconciling differences, conducting data analysis and interpretation, sharing and validating findings, prompting group learning, and producing recommendations.

Most studies reported multiple gatherings with different purposes and sometimes with different audiences. For example, Alvarez et al. (2010) reported the use of workshops at the outset to support evaluation design and to train participants and near the end of the project to bring communities together to increase the reach of the findings to various stakeholder groups. Brandão, Silva, & Codas, 2012 described how marginalized youth were trained to conduct peer-based interviews with other youths. Crishna, 2006a/b recounted the use of workshops for building trust between funders and community members and for training adults and children on participatory evaluation. Duggan (2010) reported the use of peer support meetings and training in monitoring and evaluation methods. Earl and Carden (2002) described the use of an initial outcome mapping workshop and regular monitoring workshops in which participants shared and analyzed evaluation data to refine the program. Edge and Marphatia (2015) reported the use of national and international research workshops that engaged project representatives in a full range of evaluation tasks. Guerra-Lopez and Hicks (2015) recounted the use of working sessions with representatives to build consensus and reconcile competing perspectives across power differences, and the implementation of train-the-trainer sessions to equip stakeholder representatives to prepare participants in their stakeholder groups to undertake evaluation tasks. Hamilton et al. (2000) reported the use of workshops help a range of stakeholders develop skills to support evaluative data collection and analysis and to use the findings for goal setting and action planning. Nandi et al. (2015) claimed workshops were used to draft evaluation plans and reports, identify issues and questions, foster ownership, build active engagement, and develop common understanding of evaluation purposes and activities. Torres (2000) said training sessions were used to build facilitation skills for local management teams who had been nominated by village authorities to be responsible for the project plan, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and workshops took place in the context of large-scale community assemblies in which participants from different stakeholder groups analyzed evaluation findings to help inform public action mandates. Wilder and Walpole (2008) reported widespread use of training in Most Significant Change methodology for participants to improve their systematic observation, recording and interpretation of stories at different organizational levels.

Using large-scale events

We were struck by the scale of some of the participatory processes and gatherings described in the studies in our sample, and by the application of creative techniques, tools and methods used in these processes and events. Admittedly, it was difficult at times to interpret the reporting in numerous studies as to whether the participatory events described were related to evaluation or program activities, or were focused on participatory evaluation activities versus data gathering. Sometimes this ambiguity stemmed from the fact the evaluation-related workshops or meetings described were integrated into larger processes
or events associated with the programs or interventions. Nonetheless, the scale and creativity involved can provide inspiration for how to include large numbers of diverse stakeholders. Alzate (2000) offered a robust description of large-scale inclusion in reporting on the use in Colombia of a series of three-day “assemblies” involving 300-600 men, women, youths and children from Indigenous communities as well as local leaders, government officials and other stakeholders to design and implement a community-based M&E system focused on resource allocation and use covering the three-year electoral cycles of local governments. Alzate reports these assemblies are responsible for the entire planning and M&E process and that “what is decided at [them] is regarded as official and adhered to” (p. 98).

Two other notable descriptions of large-scale inclusion both involved the use of popular theatre approaches to allow local stakeholders to share control over form and content of policy, program and M&E activities. Chinyowa (2011) described a process in Zimbabwe that began with “mammoth” community engagement event, leading to youth-led theatre performances with post-performance public policy discussions held with stakeholders (grouped by age and gender categories), and eventually leading to an advocacy phase. Bagamoyo College of Arts et al. (2002) reported how a youth-led popular theatre project focused on HIV/AIDS in Tanzania reached 100 wards in 4 regions and involved at least 1100 local young people as artist/researchers, who were selected for gender and geographic balance. In addition, local community members and officials were described as being engaged through debriefs after theatre performances.

**Innovating creative methods, tools and techniques**

The use of visually-based tools and techniques in participatory evaluation activities stood out as a creative approach in our sample. Alzate (2000) noted the use of visually-based indicators helped facilitate communication between different groups of actors; while, Hamilton et al. (2000) reported the participatory development of indicators in pictorial format encouraged dialogue among all stakeholders (including those from less literate groups), concluding “the creation of pictures by the user group is a leveling exercise in which all participants draw the pictures and so develop equal ownership of the process” (p. 16). Hart and Rajbhandary (2003) described the use of a “social mapping” activity in which Nepalese children analyzed the social inclusion and exclusion of others relative to their program activities. This multifaceted activity involved card sorting to see patterns of participation, and to portray program structures (e.g., roles, decision-making). The authors also described how the children used matrices to identify benefits, compare favourite activities, and generate ideas for future activities, and how they drew Venn diagrams to identify people and organizations of influence (Hart & Rajbhandary, 2003). In other examples, Lawrence et al. (2000) reported how farmers in Bolivia and Laos used adapted versions of bio-resource flow diagrams to illustrate their farming systems and to develop indicators; and, Kariuki and Njuki (2013) reported on the use in of participatory impact diagramming of drought reduction initiatives with local residents in Kenya.

Creative use of storytelling and narrative approaches were also evident. For example, Cornwall (2014) described the use in a project in East Africa of “temporal narratives generated through the use of visualization methods aimed at facilitating story telling” (p. 7) to support participants in collectively analyzing past experiences and opportunities for the future; Tapella and Rodriguez-Bilella (2014) noted the use in the Guatemalan context of a participatory, multi-stakeholder, storytelling approach aimed at narrating a story of change linking activities, outputs and outcomes; and, Wilder and Walpole (2008) and Willetts & Crawford (2007) reported the use of narrative-based methods in studies using a Most Significant Change approach.

There was also evidence in our sample of creative use of multimedia approaches. For example, Kogon, Kellner, and Austin (2015) described the use with South African farmers of photovoice and photo elicitation methods in an evaluation study on land management; while, Newman (2008) noted the use in community workshops in an evaluation of a social change initiative in Nigeria of videos portraying different group experiences as a means to generate reflection and discussion around issues, and to support evaluation planning.

### 4. Concluding thoughts

Our goal in this paper was to highlight the multiple and creative ways used for the inclusion of stakeholders in participatory processes in the international domain. At the outset, we were convinced we would not find much discussion in the literature about stakeholder inclusion, an omission we thought would be quite concerning given the challenging contexts of participatory practice internationally. In the end, we were surprised by the creative effort and means used for the inclusion of a broad and diverse range of stakeholders. Inclusion, at least in the international domain, has broad and interconnected implications, from evaluator stance, project rationale, evaluation design and implementation, and project governance and management. We were struck by the scale of some development programs, geographically and in terms of the number of diverse program sponsors and stakeholders, necessitating evaluators to devise highly creative, innovative techniques to try to ensure that everyone can have a voice, regardless of location, language, gender, age or culture. Frequently, however, these efforts seemed to be devoted more to finding ways to gather data from participants (i.e., as ‘data sources’ or ‘informants’) rather than involving them as participants in the ‘true’ sense of that word in the participatory evaluation field. To our reading, the line between the inclusion of stakeholders as data sources or as active participants in the evaluation process remained blurred for many of the study authors. Despite this ambiguity, there was a significant focus across the sample on the architecture of inclusion.

Also evident in our analysis of the 51 studies was a sense that the use of participatory or collaborative approaches in international development evaluation is infused with ideas and values stemming from decades of global efforts to improve societies, in part, through a focus on the inclusion in social, political and economic development processes of marginalized individuals and groups. The notion of “inclusion” has thus become integral to the discourses of equity, diversity, fairness, justice, rights and democracy that feature prominently in international development and social science contexts, a call to which the field of evaluation has indeed heeded. Most recently, Mertens and Wilson (2012) identified social justice approaches to evaluation that explicitly address issues of power, social justice, inequities, human rights, and cultural complexity. Evaluation within this paradigm is focused on promoting the practice of evaluation as liberating and decolonizing for marginalized and underrepresented people (Hopson, 2014), and include approaches such as transformative participatory (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998), transformative (Mertens, 1999, 2009), democratic (MacDonald, 1976), deliberative democratic (House & Howe, 2000), critical evaluation (Everett, 1996; Fay, 1987), cultural and contextually responsive approaches (Frierson, Hood, Hughes, & Thomas, 2010; Hopson, 2009; Madison, 1992), and values-engaged, educative (Greene, Boyce, & Ahn, 2011; Greene, DeStefano, Burgon, & Hall, 2006). As Greene, Millett, & Hopson (2004) note, evaluation so conceptualized has a liberating role to play in extricating society from this particular social construction of privilege and advantage. Given that evaluation inevitably advances certain values and interests and not others, it can either maintain and reinforce the existing system, or it can serve to challenge, disrupt, and strive to change the existing social order to one that is more equitable, and just more democratic (p.102).

Similarly, the goal of those who promote inclusion in international development and research has been to prompt proactive efforts on the part of those actors putatively in control of decisions, institutions, programs and processes to include historically marginalized people and groups to ensure their rights are protected and that they feel respected, that they belong, have a voice, and are treated fairly. As Fraser and Honneth (2003) argue, a focus on inclusion thus involves addressing
issues of recognition (e.g., acknowledging diverse others and valuing their participation), representation (e.g., finding ways for all those affected to be involved and to have a “say”), redistribution (e.g., sharing power or resources in fair and equitable manner) and rights (e.g., upholding moral, conventional or legal obligations). In practice, the means by which inclusions (and exclusions) occur are mediated by philosophical, political and practical considerations that affect and constrain the plans and practices of evaluators, as well as those of members and stakeholders of the programs or initiatives being evaluated (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). International development contexts frequently manifest a complex mix of considerations related to culture, language, power, politics, geographic scale, resources, capacities, and so forth (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016), which shape decisions and practices related to inclusions (and exclusions) in participatory evaluations aiming to address aspects of Fraser and Honneth’s four R’s. Future research might thus focus on whether such transformative goals have been achieved over time. For example, do historically marginalized populations now have greater voice and agency in broader society? Do people now interact differently as a result of inclusionary efforts? In short, what effect has collaboration had on sustained, transformative change?

While there was a general awareness of these issues in the studies we reviewed, our overall sense is that they could be surfaced and brought to the fore, perhaps altering the ways in which inclusion is conceived and practiced in participatory evaluation in international development, aligning it more with transformative or social justice oriented approaches. To do so could mean shifting from a vision of inclusion that conceptualizes participants as data sources, as ‘representation’, to one that is really about ‘recognition’ of participants as being an intrinsic part of our collective humanity, and about ‘redistributing’ resources, power, and voice to ultimately create a more equitable, just and humane world.

References


