

# DOSSIER #1

OCTOBER 2024

# THINKING TOGETHER ABOUT PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION



OPERATIONAL APPROACHES AND TOOLS  
PUBLIC POLICIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES  
MEANINGFUL LEARNINGS



**PETAS**

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# Introduction

*EvalParticipativa* is a joint research and outreach initiative that has been undertaken since 2019 by Social and Environmental Labour Studies Program ([PETAS](#)), part of the National University of San Juan (Argentina), and the [Focelac+](#) project for the development of capacities and the coordination of evaluation stakeholders in Latin America, run by the German Institute for Development Evaluation ([DEval](#)). The collaboration between these two entities has allowed them to combine and integrate their respective characteristics and potentialities in an original effort of reflection and practice on participatory evaluation in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Since its inception, EvalParticipativa aimed to be a community of practice and learning that would bring together all individuals and organisations interested in social participation approaches to evaluation, provided they felt motivated and were willing to share their practice and learn in a horizontal and collective manner. This engagement has taken various forms, from simply sharing a publication for our resource bank to specific involvement in organising local, national, or regional workshops, developing webinars, or other training opportunities.

One of the most significant events in the history of EvalParticipativa was the development of the first [First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean](#), held in Quito (Ecuador) at the end of 2019. This event allowed for an in-depth reflection on many of the topics shared on the platform to date. The attendees shared their knowledge and contributed inputs that culminated in [Sowing & Harvesting. Participatory Evaluation Handbook](#), a widely used and consulted material both in the region and globally, following its [English version](#).

One of the privileged forms of communication and exchange, and with the greatest impact on the EvalParticipativa community of practice and learning, has been the contributions of cases, experiences, and reflective articles on our web platform. These have showcased the richness and diversity of social participation evaluation practices in the region, with occasional contributions from colleagues from other contexts. It was from these original materials that the idea emerged to compile them into a Dossier such as this, making them available in an easily accessible and unified format.

The articles in this Dossier are organised into four main sections. The first section, Public Policies and Civil Society, presents contributions that emphasise reflection and experiences regarding the involvement of social actors in public policy evaluation processes. The second section, Conceptual Perspectives, brings together contributions

that combine epistemological, historical, and contextual insights, allowing for the exploration of the plurality (and sometimes controversy) among the authors and their perspectives. The third section, Meaningful Learnings, reflects on experiences and, above all, on the lessons learned from field practice in evaluation and social participation. Finally, the fourth section presents Operational Approaches and Tools, a space for reflection on the potentialities and limitations of concrete tools designed to actively involve people in the context of an evaluation.

This Dossier #1 seeks to convey our commitment to bringing together voices and experiences concerning participatory evaluation in the Latin American and Caribbean region. We hope it will serve as a resource for consultation and discussion for public institutions, foundations, NGOs and young evaluators. Each of them is also invited to join in this call expressed by the Dossier's title: to think together about participatory evaluation. We encourage you to explore the contributions included here, as well as those we continue to add to the [EvalParticipativa](#) platform and share on our social networks.

Pablo Rodríguez-Bilella  
Esteban Tapella  
on behalf of the  
EvalParticipativa coordination team



# PUBLIC POLICIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY



# Evaluation and the Central Role of Civil Society. Reflections as Preparation for the First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation (PE) Experiences for Latin America and the Caribbean

by *Esteban Tapella*

Interest in evaluating public policies has grown significantly in the last fifteen years. This is reflected in theoretical and methodological production as well in the increase of national evaluation policies in countries of all continents. It

is also seen in the increasing institutionalisation of evaluation and a surge of initiatives focused on making this practice more professional. Since the 2015 'International Year of Evaluation' evaluation has become a global trend. This has made the main international development organisations converge their interests and actions with regional evaluation networks (VOPEs), foundations, various government bodies, non-governmental organisations and academia; all of whom are interested in maximising evaluation as an instrument for improving public policies.

In addition to this, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were an important step forward for evaluation theory and practice. With regard to our context, the idea is to generate a new agenda of global evaluation priorities from 2016 to 2030 which aims to bridge the gap between the community of evaluators (supply) and the community of decision makers (demand), giving a central role to civil society as way of ensuring that evaluations do not only respond to the needs of end users but also meet evidence-based quality standards which are credible and can be used to create and manage public policies.

But the topic of participation and the leading role of society in evaluation is nothing new. This has been developing over years under other names such as *Participatory Monitoring*



or Tracking, Democratic Evaluation, Systematisation or Capitalisation of Experiences, More Significant Change, Systemic Approach in Evaluation and Complex Evaluation, to name but a few. The change is seen in the fact that today, participation is consistently featured in many different approaches. While some nuances differ, the context and perspective of stakeholders is seen as increasingly important when valuing and attributing effects and results to a specific intervention.

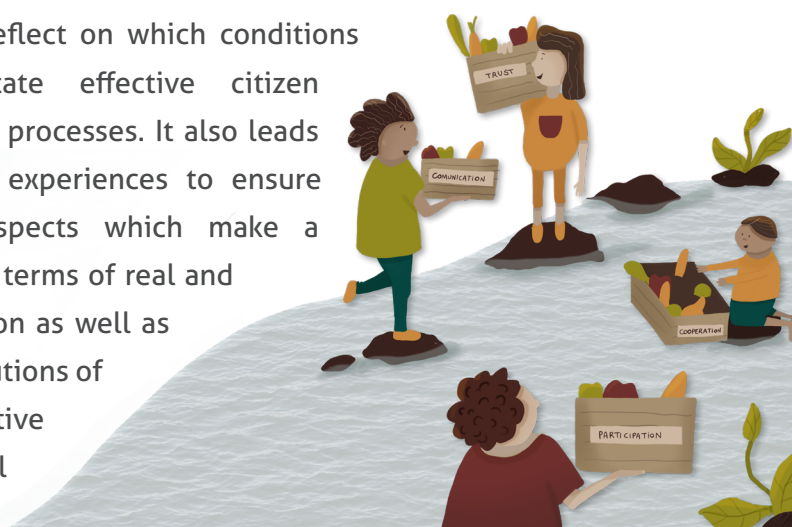
## From 'participativitis' to citizen participation

As we have said, the need for citizen participation has been increasingly emphasised not only in public policy design but also in their evaluations. Civil society has therefore been given a more central role in evaluative practice. Concepts such as 'participation', 'support', 'stakeholder perspective or perception' are increasingly frequent in the evaluative field.

However, besides the discourse and good intentions, the practice of evaluation does not always reflect this participatory 'vocation' as the notion of participation can have different connotations. Often, programmes and projects which tend to 'foster' participation ignore the fact that participation activity can easily become simply a symbolic simulation if there is not the conscious awareness that power needs to be redistributed if a process is to be truly participatory. Therefore, in many cases, PE tends to be limited to mere consultations which do not offer local stakeholders the possibility of influencing decisions regarding the evaluative agenda. These recurrent practices are evidence of a lack of theoretical clarity and good quality instruments in many evaluations which claim to be participatory. The reasons for this deficit are not understood.

### So how do we ensure that stakeholders in society participate and are given a leading role in evaluating programmes or projects that affect or involve them?

This question makes us reflect on which conditions and mechanisms facilitate effective citizen participation in evaluation processes. It also leads us to deepen evaluative experiences to ensure that they understand aspects which make a difference in evaluation in terms of real and effective social participation as well as exploring possible contributions of participatory and collaborative approaches to conventional evaluations.



## Let me do it! Teach me how to do it!

In my opinion, the notion of participation is the result of two merging dynamics: the *opportunity to participate* and the *capacity to participate*. The first is determined by the institutional and political willingness of those who design and conduct evaluations to create spaces for real participation. The second is determined mainly by the attitudes and skills that civil society stakeholders have developed in previous experiences. It is possible to talk about participation when these two dynamics come together: in other words, the capacity of residents to participate are subject to the opportunities 'opened up' by the institution, programme or project.

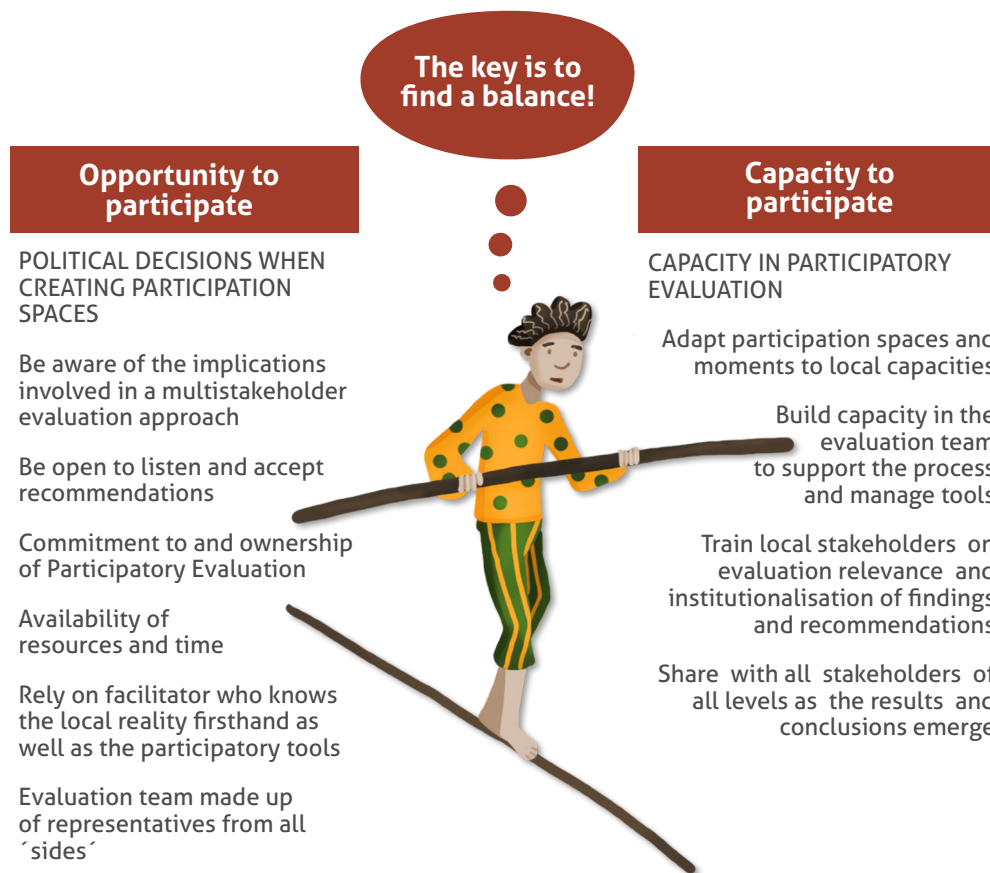
Regarding the opportunity to participate, experience tells me that not all institutions/programmes that instigate participatory evaluation are truly willing to facilitate and support these processes. Among other challenges, I would like to highlight a few which I feel are the most relevant:

- it is important that representatives of different levels of the evaluated programme are truly committed to this type of evaluation and that they are aware of the implications involved in multi-stakeholder evaluation and are open to listen to and adopt, from the very beginning, recommendations which may emerge;
- the institution/programme needs to have enough time and resources. Creating real spaces so that civil society has the leading role implies long, slow and expensive processes and not all institutions are willing to take this on;
- it is really important to be able to rely on the support of a local facilitator who knows firsthand the reality and idiosyncrasies of the participants in addition to having a good grasp on communication and socio-cultural activity tools;
- a determining feature is if the institution requests or generates capacity-building activities for local stakeholder participants. In most cases, participatory and evaluative experience of the main interested stakeholders is very limited;
- and it is important to form a relatively small evaluation team which consists of representatives from all groups involved. It should be a central part of all processes starting with prioritising the most relevant topics and formulating the questions and objectives through to communicating results and making sure they are put into action. It should also be part of defining indicators, collecting and analysing data and forming conclusions and recommendations.

With regard to the capacity to participate, I feel that those of us who encourage these processes are confronted with a big challenge. Especially in contexts like those in Latin

America which have been reticent and inflexible about creating participatory experiences for a long time. Without a doubt, capacity for participation is created when an institution offers opportunities for participation and encourages settlement residents and other stakeholders to take a central role in evaluative practice. But, in addition to the existing 'participation opportunities' which act as basic motivation for the participants, it is necessary to initiate an active capacity-building process throughout the process.

### How to confront difficulties and challenges to enable real participation in evaluation?



In my experience, the main challenges are:

- the effort required to match moments of participation with stakeholder capacity, seeking common interests that are within the reach of the participants (for example, do not expect members of a grassroots organisation to get involved in designing a statistical survey for an impact evaluation) and supporting them when challenges arise;

- the confidence to use a varied set of tools for democratic and participatory evaluation which exist today and be able to use them appropriately and/or replicate them so that they are useful for participatory processes which require evaluation (creating suitable tools, games or activities which guarantee that everyone remains at the centre of the process, rather than just the most extroverted);
- the recognition that the tools 'can't do everything'; that a participatory vocation must be evident in the gathering in addition to dialogue among the participants. This vocation is expressed in tolerance for mistakes, willingness to 'explain again', the ability to revisit agreements and redesign working plans etc.;
- and a clarity around our role as external agents, even though we are participants, throughout the process; this means: 'motivating' without 'pushing', 'reflecting' with the group without 'conditioning' conclusions, 'sharing ideas' without 'imposing them' and 'asking questions' without 'suggesting answers'.

## By way of conclusion

When we think about what PE is and what its implication is for civil society, an endless amount of possible definitions arise. Some are more ambitious than others in terms of involving multiple stakeholders. Part of the process of collective construction proposed by this community of learning is understanding what PE is, but we would also like to think that in this upcoming gathering we could explore how evaluation is participatory when the different parties involved determine *what will be evaluated, who will participate, when it will take place, what data collection and analysis methods will be used and how the results will be communicated*. We hope that future PE favours the active and conscious incorporation of organisation members in the evaluative process.

And as in every evaluation, a participatory approach should be helpful for gaining knowledge, making changes and taking corrective measures to gain better results; adding or removing activities or simply changing organisational strategy. In other words, evaluation should help contribute to new and different knowledge for policy and programme creation. Yet, ensuring that PE is capable of strengthening organisations so they can have more control over their own development is just as important. This type of evaluation should also act as a tool to build capacity among various stakeholders as they reflect on, analyse and propose solutions from multiple perspectives.

In a participatory evaluation workshop held many years ago in Costa Rica, we collectively compiled a list of principles which could help guide this practice. The result of that activity

was enlightening. I personally feel that those ideas reflect the spirit of *EvalParticipativa*. We concluded that participatory evaluation:

- recognises the value of experience and the knowledge and perception held by the local population involved;
- does not limit itself to consulting the population, but rather incorporates them into decision-making throughout the whole process;
- creates multiple spaces for information gathering, analysis and use by diverse stakeholders involved;
- provides procedures, tools and user-friendly methodologies which facilitate participation among multiple stakeholders, who usually have different capacities and strengths;
- and does not rely on 'evaluators' but rather professionals who work as facilitators in the process (design, data collection, processing, information analysis and use) to develop local potential.

We hope that the first gathering of PE experiences for Latin America and the Caribbean to be held in Quito, Ecuador next November will allow us to analyse these ideas, replicate them and move towards consolidating a new evaluation paradigm which integrates social participation.

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Originally published 30 September 2019

# Aligning Agendas to Promote Participation in Public Policies



by *Susana Menéndez-Roldán, María Dolores Torralbo-Obrero and Salustiano Luque-Lozano*

A few months ago, the [Practical Guide for Participatory Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies: Mainstreaming Participation](#)

(available in Spanish) was added to the EvalParticipativa [Resources](#) section. We, Susana Menéndez-Roldán, María Dolores Torralbo-Obrero and Salustiano Luque-Lozano, from the Andalusian Institute of Public Administration (Andalusia, Spain), have written this post to tell you more about this guide.

Citizen participation is the best way to achieve social inclusion. It is, after all, one of the goals included in the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda (SDGs). More specifically, it aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies that can achieve sustainable development, facilitate access to justice for all people, and build effective, inclusive and accountable institutions at all levels. Gender equality is another important goal to ensure the full and effective participation of women and equal leadership opportunities at all decision-making levels in political, economic and public life.

However, the participation of women and men in public policies cannot be fully exercised if adequate mechanisms are not put in place. It is true that anyone can get involved in associations and popular participatory initiatives, but when it comes to public policies, citizens can only take part if they are given the opportunity to do so, along with appropriate governance models and participatory procedures.

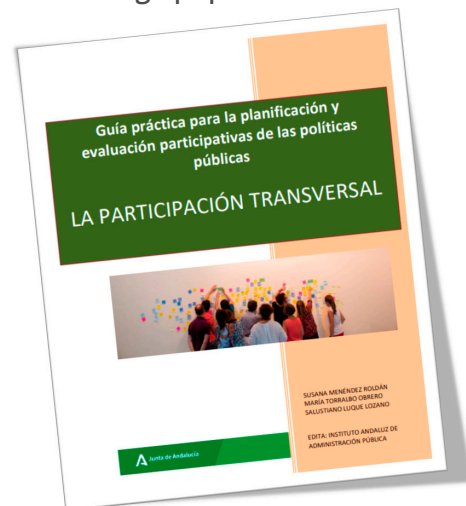
Public administrations are usually the ones responsible for integrating participation models into their policies when they develop their plans and evaluations. They are the ones to determine the degree of information provided to, and decision-making capacity

of, the individuals or general public concerned, as well as the level of consultation that will take place. However, they find it difficult to apply these models due to various reasons: short-termism, ignorance, fear, paternalistic attitudes, etc.

Furthermore, in order to participate, people must feel that their opinion matters and know how to participate through mechanisms and tools that have been adapted to the different groups. It is only by participating fully that citizens learn about the inner workings of politics, and fairer, more democratic, sustainable and long-lasting actions are achieved. This is thanks to the fact that the more someone is involved in something, the more ownership and care they feel towards it, and the more they can learn from the process.

Some institutions are tackling these challenges, including the [Andalusian Institute of Public Administration](#) (IAAP), an Andalusian regional government agency (Spain) that has been working for more than five years constructing methodologies and practical tools for public administration policy evaluations, training the staff who work on them and providing help and advice for their application in specific projects. This guide was published at the beginning of 2021 in response to the challenge to implement a realistic governance model where participation is integrated into public policy planning and evaluation. Its most innovative feature is the mainstreaming of co-decision-making participation in administration policies of all levels (state, regional or local) rather than only in local contexts, as is more common, perhaps because of the difficulties inherent in forming teams and attempting to make joint decisions with large populations.

A comprehensive theoretical and practical bibliography was consulted during the drafting of this guide, drawing from different methodological sources, including previous work by the IAAP itself. It is written with the diverse administration units and professionals in mind, with the aim of providing flexible methodologies and tools for mainstreaming gender-sensitive participation in public policy plans and evaluations from beginning to end.



Mainstreaming participation means considering the participation of women and men as policies are planned, and being flexible about what participatory model and method is chosen according to different variables, such as social factors, economic costs, time restrictions, policy objectives, the target population and their needs, the sectors or areas affected by the policy, and the human and technical resources involved in public policy

planning. In all cases, it is committed to a methodological coherence that weighs up the advantages of participation, going beyond processes that are merely advisory, seeking to mainstream gender-sensitive participation at all stages of the public policy cycle.

The guide is organised into three sections:

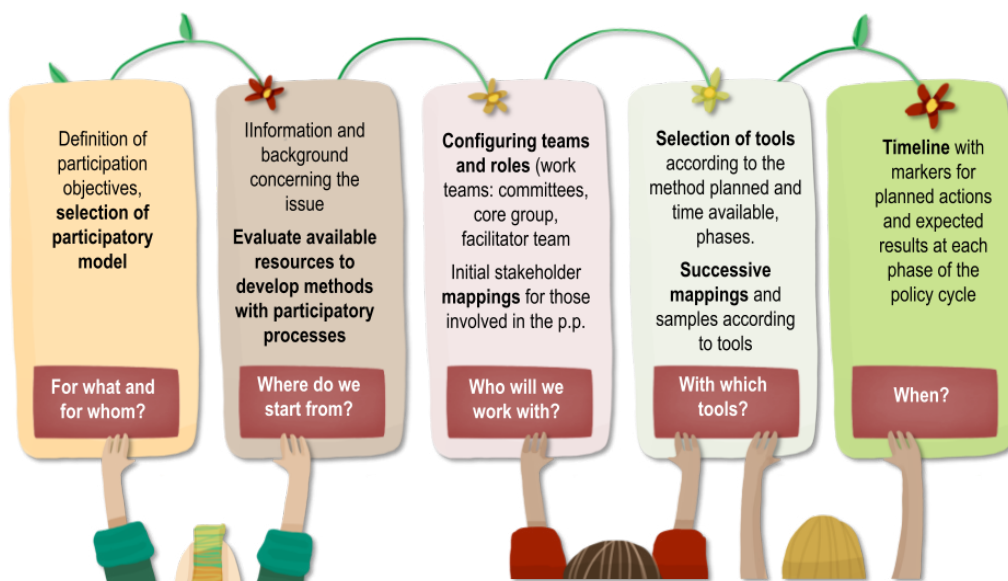
### First section.

Introduces the general regulatory framework that underpins the right of citizens to participate in public policies. It presents participation as a pillar for strengthening democracy and empowering individuals, and sets out the advantages offered by participation to improve policy planning, implementation and evaluation..

### Second section.

Explains methodological concepts, participatory models and proposals for mainstreaming participation throughout the public policy cycle in a way that is flexible, adaptable and proportional to the aim, degree of joint activity, diversity of staff and other individuals, circumstances, contexts, resources and policy cycle phases. This section is divided into two sub-sections for methods, one for participatory planning and the other for participatory evaluation.

## Sequence proposed by the guide to integrate participation into planning and/or evaluation processes



### Third section.

Includes a large repertoire of participatory tools and useful tips regarding how to select, prepare, implement and adapt them to the target audience and context. It also discusses how each tool can be used in different phases and for different purposes, proposing variations and links to examples. It is worth highlighting the stakeholder mappings that take into account gender intersectionality, the choice of population samples and tools for decision-making, which are innovative in the context of supralocal administrations and will be of great help to incorporate participation in each phase. It also includes a list for self-evaluating and reviewing participation in the different phases of a public policy cycle.

It is hoped that this guide will act as a tool to ensure that participation is helpful to people, rather than just institutions. It seeks to promote a change of attitudes among policy-makers and public administration technical staff by informing them about different participatory models and the possibility of developing them beyond mere regulatory approaches or governance policies in order to attain real social impact, aligned with the international agenda's sustainable development goals.

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# Participation in the Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean. Second Edition, July 2021

by *Sergio Martinic* and *Luis Soberón*

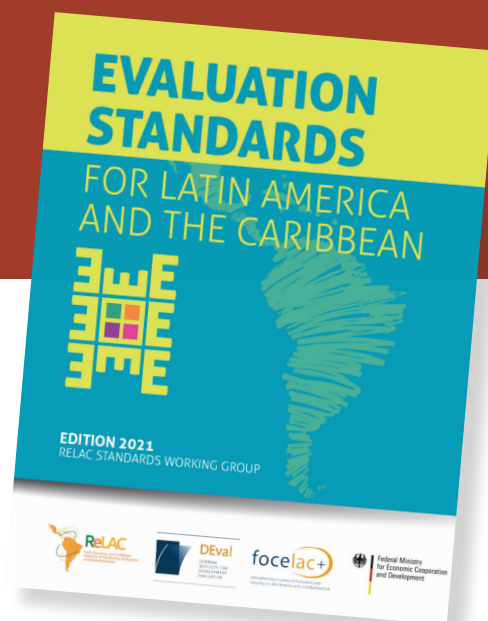
This article describes the drafting process for the recently published revised and expanded Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean. We give a brief description of the methodology followed, highlighting its participatory nature and the most significant milestones and results. We then examine in more detail questions concerning participation, a cross-cutting thread of particular interest that is woven through all four dimensions and the twenty standards that make up the Standards document.

The document itself can be accessed in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [Portuguese](#).

## Participatory construction of the standards

In 2017 and 2018, the ReLAC Standards Working Group encouraged and promoted presentations on the Standards document that was drafted in 2016, and subsequent discussions. Evaluators from the region participated in this process at seminars, conferences and workshops. The Standards document was thus disseminated and could later be developed and updated thanks to the suggestions that were received in response. In 2019, the ReLAC Executive Committee organised round tables concerning the Standards and invited ReLAC thematic working group participants to have another detailed look at the document so their contributions could be used in its revision.

The thematic group participation was organised into four areas: gender and human rights; indigenous peoples; academia and professional competence; and young evaluators<sup>[1]</sup>.



Each area held three meetings: the first was for the general exchange and brainstorming of topics of interest for each thematic block, while the second and third meetings were used to delve more deeply into the most interesting or concerning issues. A summary report was prepared, specifying the main contributions, questions and suggestions, both for the document as a whole, and for each of the dimensions and standards. An annex included the summaries for each respective thematic block and the list of participants[2].

In 2020, the Standards Working Group was expanded to include new participants (coordinators and opinion leaders from the discussion groups), enabling the inclusion of a greater diversity of perspectives, experiences and countries from the region[3]. The Working Group was set up as a Committee of Experts, taking on the task of revising and developing a new standards document based on input from a large number of evaluators in the region.

As part of the revision process, the following steps were carried out: gathering and reviewing the reports from the previous stages of the discussion; preparing questions to guide the reading of the material and identifying the main issues and problems; developing comparative matrices with proposals for responses to identified questions and topics; and developing a shared perspective, drafting new texts and validating the result. The process focused on three key aspects that had emerged from the discussions: the social and cultural context of Latin America; making the principles and conceptual framework more explicit; and the cross-cutting topics (gender, human rights and interculturality and indigenous peoples).

A draft of the new document was discussed and validated within the working group and later in a consultation with evaluators from the ReLAC working groups. The suggestions made were summarised in a matrix[4] that served as an input for a last revision and final drafting of the new version of the document, released publicly on 30 August 2021.

## Participation in the standards

Participation is a key theme in the Standards, as specifically mentioned in the relevance and usefulness dimension, under the concept of *effective participation*. It refers to evaluation that 'takes into account the perspectives of the different stakeholders



concerned'. This means making an effort to identify such stakeholders, recognise them, promote their participation from the initial evaluation design phase through to the communication of results, and anticipate the most relevant moments and spaces for their participation in the work plan.

In the Standards, the four dimensions that promote high-quality evaluation are \*Rigour, \*Ethics and Legal Principles, \*Cultural Understanding, and \*Relevance and Usefulness. An interrelated set of twenty standards are organised into these four dimensions as follows: 5 – 5 – 3 – 7 respectively. These dimensions and standards have been constructed taking into account human rights, gender and interculturality approaches, as well as the principles of ethics and professional integrity, equality, transparency, inclusion and transformation of reality.



The need to carry out effective participation is fundamentally concerned with the rights and interests of the communities, populations and social sectors that development interventions seek to support and that, in the Latin American and Caribbean region, are largely subordinated and left without adequate levels of access to public resources and services. These same groups also often endure conditions of poverty and are negatively affected by their identities, cultural heritage and discrimination.

Due to the intersecting of approaches and principles, effective participation should indeed occur in the very design and implementation of the development intervention. It is essential in the evaluation so that diverse perspectives and value criteria are included. It is also important to promote empowerment and prepare the stakeholders to take on board the evaluation results in line with their development interests. For these reasons, participation is considered a central element and condition. It is also deemed to be key because of its ramifications and the way it is woven through all the dimensions and standards proposed in the document.

The following standards are the ones that are most clearly relevant in terms of effective participation.

The following standards are the ones that are most clearly relevant in terms of effective participation.

**In dimension 1.** Rigour: 'Relevant and agreed evaluation questions'.

**In dimension 2.** Ethics and legal principles: 'Respect for people's rights'.

**In dimension 3.** Cultural understanding: 'Equality and equity' and 'Reciprocity and interculturality'.

In **dimension 4**. Relevance and usefulness: obviously 'Effective participation' but also 'Mutually agreed purposes'.

If we merge the above standards to form a definition, effective participation implies that concerned stakeholders participate in the evaluation process by deciding what questions will guide the evaluation and the equal rights of individuals and communities are recognised in the evaluation implementation process. However, specific detail on when participation can be deemed effective or not is still to be developed.

By way of attempting to define when participation is effective or not, the idea of 'active learning' can be taken from the field of education. This refers to learning that occurs when learner participation involves cognitive processes of reflecting, analysing, applying and transferring the subjects studied in the teaching-learning process. Following this logic, it could be said that effective participation in evaluation occurs when the community or population – through representation and processes of collective dialogue – analyses, discusses and reflects on the purposes, questions, and processes of the evaluation at different moments, in relation to their interests and perspectives, concerning the way the current and future development intervention has an affect and influence on them.

## Conclusions

ReLAC considers the Standards document to be a living document that at the same time as guiding professional practice, should be continuously revised and updated. With regard to participation, the expectation is that experiences of applying the standards and systematising them, and debate on the diversity of situations experienced, can lead to a broader and more astute idea of what effective participation means in the evaluation context.

More broadly, with regard to the document as a whole, a periodic revision and update is planned and, in the meantime, practical experiences of applying it, and conceptual aspects that enable depth and precision, suggested guidelines and definitions will be collected and systematised. Thus, a common guiding framework will be built through participation and dialogue that is key for the consolidation of evaluation culture and professional practice in Latin America.

For an introduction to the Standards, you can watch the following animated [video](#).

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**Sergio Martinic** is an anthropologist and has a PhD in Sociology. His academic work focuses on the evaluation of educational inequalities and educational policies in Chile and Latin America. He is currently an academic and Director of the Social Sciences Department at the University of Aysén, Chile and a member of the ReLAC Standards Working Group.

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[1] The groups and their coordinators were: Gender and Human Rights: Pablo Rodríguez Billela; Indigenous Peoples and Evaluation from the South: Andrea Peroni; Academics and Professional Competence: Luis Soberón; Youth: Andrea María Wherle and Sergio Martinic.

[2] ReLAC-Standards Working Group. Round Table Discussion July – December 2019. Global systematisation of the contributions of the meetings. Prepared by Luis Soberón (MSc)

[3] The following people make up the working group: Fabiola Amariles (Colombia), Marcia Itzel Checa (Mexico), Celeste Ghiano (Argentina), Ana Luisa Guzmán (Costa Rica), Sergio Martinic (Chile), Andrea Peroni (Chile), Luis Soberón (Peru) and Andrea María Wehrle (Paraguay).

[4] The summary workshop and matrix were created by Emma Rotondo (Peru)

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# Civil Society and Participatory Evaluation



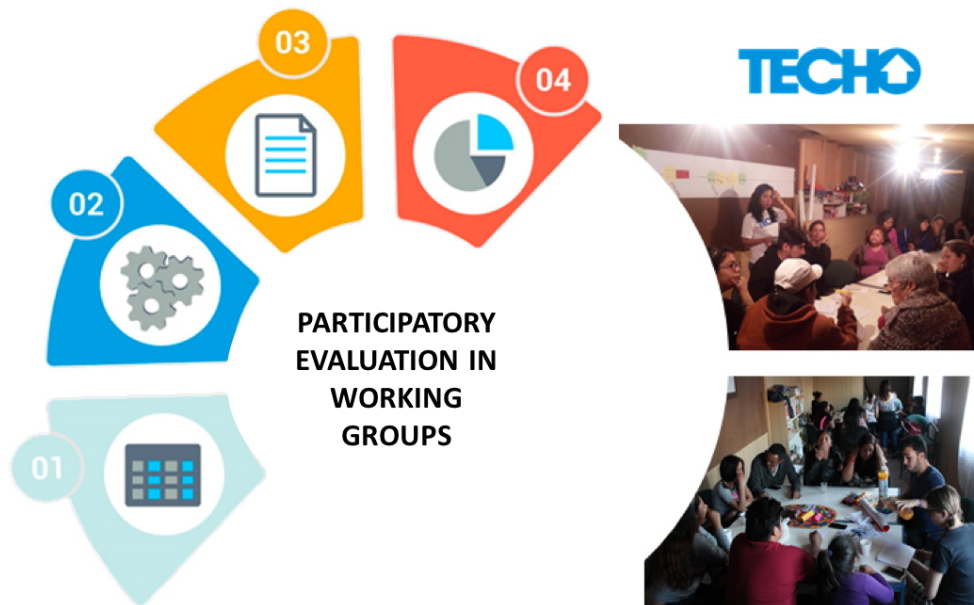
by *María Jesús Silva Rozas*

In order to contribute to desired social transformations, civil society organisations require a system that enables them to, at the very least, monitor and evaluate their work. Monitoring and evaluation are foundational to our intervention strategies. We must, therefore, continually ask ourselves: *what role does evaluation have in civil society organisations?, what type of evaluation is the most suitable and useful for these organisations?, what factors should we consider when evaluating work?*

Those of us involved with [TECHO](#) have adhered to this Community of Practice and Learning and are EvalParticipativa partners. As protagonists in this organisation, and in line with our intention to contribute to reflections offered by other organisations, we have created the questions featured above. Today we would like to share our own reflection and conviction with regard to adopting a participatory evaluation system. The next seven points set out what we have learned.

**Promoting the participation of vulnerable communities.** An evaluation system allows us to integrate groups living in exploitative situations. These groups are usually excluded from parts of the diagnostic, design and evaluation processes in projects. For TECHO it is important to recognise their rights to participate and freedom of opinion while we build projects based on the community's needs and strengths.

**Improve TECHO's working model and social action.** For our organisation, the evaluation system allows us to prioritise the people and communities we are working with by placing them at the centre of our vision and work. This means adopting the following points.



**01** **EVALUATION MATRIX.** This is the foundation to the process. The product of this stage, the matrix, guides the direction of the evaluation and the focus areas chosen. The main evaluation dimensions are prioritized here.

**03** **INFORMATION GATHERING.** In this stage, we should: - Involve residents who both are and are not related to community leadership. - Ensure that as many residents as possible participate. - Sensitivity and tact when addressing and giving new meaning to process contingencies.

**02** **INSTRUMENT DESIGN.** Here, residents' perceptions regarding the community and the influence that these will have on the evaluation project is registered. For these experiences, three information sources have been key: the community's history, key stakeholders and a collective record of process indicators.

**04** **VALIDATION AND RETURN** It is necessary to ensure that there is appropriate systematisation, validation and creation of a final report which includes: Results of empirical facts gathered in the evaluation Conclusions based on results interpretation in line with criteria. Recommendations directed at actions which improve management.

**Make projects more relevant, closer to the communities and their specific development contexts.** As in the previous point, this is an opportunity to adapt the TECHO working model to the institution's values and ways of working.

**Gather lessons learned, standardise processes and improve strategies.** An evaluation system allows us to see: (a) the level of quality in completed work, (b) the project stages, processes and impact; and (c) the strategic plans or ways to improve TECHO's work in the region.

**Bring communities closer to decision-making in projects.** An evaluation system allows us to incorporate community criteria into TECHO work and tailor projects to each area and sociocultural context where social and community action is being carried out.

**Increase the efficiency of TECHO's work and activities.** The efficiency of a project is subject to the extent it is tailored to each area and specific sociocultural context. This is possible if a suitable evaluation system is used.

**Maximise dialogue and community representation in TECHO projects.** An evaluation system allows us to consolidate a working plan which incorporates social and community connection and relies on democratic, horizontal and continual communication among communities, their leaders and TECHO volunteers. This allows us to build trust and connections whilst developing working plans that can have greater impact during and following each project.

This represents not only the reason why TECHO adopts a participatory evaluation system but also its opportunity to do so. As our experience undoubtedly demonstrates, this helps us improve our intervention strategies as we increasingly integrate the communities' perspectives and viewpoints. Moreover, the system is made more comprehensive as processes and working plans are strengthened and standardised on a regional level, increasing capacity in the communities and the institution itself.

We believe that these points can work alongside other civil society organisations' working models and social action. We invite you to debate this idea, relating it to your organisation's context and the [Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

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# CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES




# EvalParticipativa: An Initiative that Gives Meaning to the Epistemologies of the South

by Celeste Ghiano

When reviewing the objectives of the EvalParticipativa Community, I read: *'[...]our aim is that this space can be used for the social and collective construction of knowledge on participatory evaluation without the need for an "expert" or "trainer"...' I also read '[...]horizontal and collective learning'. And it automatically brings to mind ideas from Popular Education (Freire), Justice against Epistemicide (de Souza Santos) and Interculturality.*

Our region has spent years developing alternative ways of thinking about evaluative processes, deconstructing ways of thinking and doing. This has introduced interesting debates that have led us to reflect not only on *how* to evaluate but also on *who* should evaluate (and from what knowledge and what feelings).

The Network for Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization of Latin America and the Caribbean ([ReLAC](#)) promotes the development of these topics through its working groups. Thus, the group, *Evaluate from Latin America* and the group [Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean](#), develop and exchange ideas, and generate theoretical and practical knowledge to cause us to think and reflect along these lines and in accordance with the network's mission and objectives.



YES, YES..., I UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATING THE PROJECT. I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT AMONG OUR PEOPLE WE ALSO HAVE A WAY TO EVALUATE WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE DO IT.

The debate on the professionalisation of evaluation (also discussed in the ReLAC community) prompts us to think that, as evaluators, there is a significant ethical and political element involved when we choose what criteria and indicators (and not others) to evaluate, leaving out other viewpoints, other findings, and other results; which would result in other recommendations. There lies the paradox that, in order to reduce the subjectivity of one view/person, rather than turning to 'objectivity' or 'evaluative neutrality', it becomes necessary to resort to the subjectivity of many people in order to build, in a democratic and participatory manner, the criteria, indicators, interpretation and evaluation results, as well as the ways of using the recommendations that come from the evaluation.

The birth of our region's evaluation community was inspired by models such as [Made in Africa Evaluation](#), the [Aloha Framework](#), the [Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association \(ANZEA\)](#) and its own path to *decolonising* evaluation with proposals such as the Indigenous Evaluation of Latin America and the Caribbean ([video](#)), [Outcome Harvesting, Evaluation from a Gender, Human Rights and Intercultural perspective](#), which use our worldviews and needs as a starting point. In this vein, it is worth visiting the [Repository](#) on Evaluation in and for Latin America and the Caribbean on the ReLAC website. There are also useful guides that have been written for a global audience but adapted to our region such as the [Guide to Transformative Gender Evaluation with Cultural Relevance in Latin America](#) or the [CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance in Latin America & the Caribbean](#).

This demonstrates that Latin America and the Caribbean offer *an Epistemology of the South*, related to other ways of thinking about certain concepts. According to De Souza Santos, the Epistemologies of the South propose an epistemological disruption, with the intention of recovering the value of integrating distinct knowledge sources through intercultural translation, making it an essential part of constructing knowledge ecologies.

Three basic ideas underpin the Epistemologies of the South: (1) global understanding far exceeds western understanding, (2) there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice, and (3) emancipatory shifts in the world can follow different patterns and scripts than those developed by western critical theory.

In this context, a clear and cross-disciplinary example in several of the above perspectives is the definition of *development*. We have traditionally been taught to think that the development model is linked to socio-economic development, of individual growth in hierarchical structures. Meanwhile, the constitutions of two countries in our region (Bolivia and Ecuador) already incorporate the perspective of *Buen Vivir (Good Living)* and *Vivir Bien (Living Well)*, terms that in Aymara and Quechua speak to us about a human development that implies *complete individual and collective well-being* in relation to



our bond with nature, others and ourselves. A collective and community development from circular structures: *I am because you are.*

Our region is one of the most diverse, with more than forty countries and overseas territories, around 600 million inhabitants and more than 430 languages. It features indigenous, immigrant, mixed-race, and diaspora groups; with wide social gaps, violated rights and great challenges, many aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This brief panorama invites us to think about the great need to create spaces for active participation so different voices are heard and contextual representations are integrated

from each community involved in an evaluation. It also requires us to think once again about evaluation's training function and its commitment to install 'inbuilt capacity' in the involved communities to ensure that they take ownership of the processes, legitimising at the same time the evaluation results, promoting a greater impact and use for decision-making.

I feel that the work of the EvalParticipativa community is fed by, and feeds, our epistemologies of the south with a Latin American and Caribbean flavour, and with great potential to influence on a global level.

I suggest the following questions, to invite the community to continue to reflect on this relationship between Epistemologies of the South and Participatory Evaluation:

- What aspects of the participatory evaluation process are typical of the region?
- What can we learn from the worldviews of the communities we work with regarding participatory methodologies, that can be incorporated into our facilitation processes?
- What do local stakeholders and communities teach us about the participatory use of evaluation results?

Thank you very much for the opportunity to reflect with you. I'm always available to continue to collectively build rigorous, ethical, culturally responsible, relevant and useful evaluation to transform people's lives and leave no one behind.

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# When Cousins Meet... Participatory Evaluation and Other Approaches



by *Pablo Rodríguez-Bilella*

In our region, Latin America and the Caribbean, participatory evaluation is the heir of some rich traditions which include the systematisation of experiences, popular education and participatory action-research. These examples share some reference points but are also characterised by their own nuances and differences.



However, a common thread, relevant here, is a liberating and transformative way of viewing reality which significantly contributes to sustaining and legitimising these initiatives.

Therefore, in order to distance participatory evaluation from purely “technical” visions, it is legitimate to insist that it is more than possible to carry out participatory evaluation without “participatory techniques”. Their absence could even be considered positive if when we use them, we are really only trying to find “fun” alternative ways of imparting content or if we are only pretending to gain the perspective of local stakeholders.

I am obviously excluding from this analysis “participatory” approaches which normalise poverty and oppression and insist on merely acting within the boundaries of what “is possible”. In these cases, it is deplorable to think that these entertaining techniques are being used in a manipulative fashion to make people endure processes imposed by external needs. In this case, the distribution of power normally fostered by participation is therefore devalued.

It is therefore important to see participatory evaluation as more than just a set of techniques, workshops or games for the consumption of the most vulnerable and excluded groups. Nor is it a valid response to view them as “second-class” evaluations for situations where a “first-class” evaluation is not possible.

While the techniques, workshops and games are not the heart and soul of the participatory evaluation in and of themselves, they are key and very relevant in participatory processes as they allow us to venture to “create together”. In the participation context, this includes throwing your whole self into the didactic activity (not just your thoughts); creating exchanges which deepen individual and mutual knowledge; handing back the leading role to the true protagonists and making debates functional; and facilitating trust and fun ways of learning. All of this reflects, and will have repercussions on, the desired transformational direction.

Often, the techniques allow us to distance ourselves somewhat from the object of analysis so that we can view it from different perspectives and by doing so, overcome conventional wisdom by taking a critical approach.

As educator Freire once said: “the best way to draw nearer is to distance oneself from the theoretical perspective of knowledge”. And if we are to help overcome conventional wisdom using techniques which contribute humour, irony, drama, surprise and collective analysis, we will facilitate knowledge production in the evaluative context.

All these considerations are valid for popular education, participatory action-research and participatory evaluation. Therefore, we should keep thinking both generally and specifically, about both the macro and the more detailed points, as this will enable us to draw nearer to these closely related disciplines and rely on them for dialogue and growth.

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# Popular Education in the 'Fe Y Alegría' Network: Reflections and Contact with Participatory Evaluation

THE PEDAGOGY OF POPULAR EDUCATION IS A PEDAGOGY OF DIALOGUE AND NOT OF MONOLITHIC DISCOURSE; OF QUESTIONS AND NOT OF PRE-ESTABLISHED ANSWERS.

by *EvalParticipativa Team*

Today we would like to share with this community of practice and learning, EvalParticipativa, the experience and perspective of the international organisation [Fe y Alegría](#) regarding its connection to participatory evaluation.

The article highlights a recent institutional document produced by this organisation, created by members of the Commission responsible for its collective construction: Beatriz Borjas, Antonio Pérez Esclarín and Vicente Palop. In this post, they first introduce us to aspects of Fe y Alegría's identity and activity as a context for its main commitment to popular education, a key element and close relative to participatory evaluation as we shared in our post [When cousins meet](#) and in the handbook, [Sowing and Harvesting](#).

Fe y Alegría is a Popular Education and Social Development movement that works with deeply impoverished and excluded sectors of society to enhance their personal development and participation in society. This movement began in Venezuela in 1955, founded by José María Vélaz SJ, together with a group of university students and thanks to the generosity of Abraham Reyes and Patricia García, who donated their home for the first school. Today, Fe y Alegría is active in 22 countries in Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

The International Federation of Fe y Alegría has prioritised the following areas of work:

**1. New Frontiers:** in line with our original charisma, we want to be bold and creative in the way we embark on new social and educational ventures in the most excluded areas.



This means adapting to new contexts and cultures in countries and continents where we are not yet present, especially in Africa.

**2. Sustainability:** we are a movement made up of people committed to the mission of social transformation. We seek to strengthen our organisational and economic sustainability to ensure effective, participatory and transparent management.

**3. Public Action:** we want to influence public policies, encourage political action in defence of the right to public education, promote communication strategies and spaces, construct new identities, foster cultural changes and create new narratives that contribute to social transformation.

**4. Popular Education:** we want to influence public policies, encourage political action in defence of the right to public education, promote communication strategies and spaces, construct new identities, foster cultural changes and create new narratives that contribute to social transformation.

In February 2019, in connection with this last identity trait, the Board of Directors from the International Federation of Fe y Alegría asked the Commission for Reflection on Popular Education to reread, in the light of the current context, Fe y Alegría's founding principles for the field of Popular Education and generate a reflection process for the various bodies of the Federation within the framework of the implementation of the Plan of Federal Priorities (PPF in Spanish) 2016-2020.

First, the commission spent time exchanging ideas with a group of external experts in order to re-conceptualise what is understood by the term, popular education, in light of new social, political, economic and educational contexts. In this process, the greatest challenge was how to link the rich history of Popular Education in Latin America with the educational reality of Africa, where Fe y Alegría has been active since 2007.

Following on from this work, the findings were presented to Fe y Alegría national directors at a face-to-face meeting in San Salvador in October 2019. Virtual dialogues were held later with managers and national leaders working in the area of Popular Education in Central America, the Southern Cone, the Andean region, Africa and the Spanish Entreculturas team in order to incorporate regional perspectives into the document.

The result of this effort was the publication of the document '[Popular Education reflection and revision in Fe y Alegría](#)' (also available in Portuguese and French). It is currently being shared and promoted and will be discussed by educators from the 22 national Fe y Alegría centres within the framework of the Pre-XLVIII International Congress of Fe y Alegría that will take place in October 2021.



This document raises similar issues to those discussed within the EvalParticipativa community of practice and learning. The closeness and harmony shared between Popular Education and Participatory Evaluation has already been mentioned on this site (and in the handbook, *Sowing and Harvesting*). The following topics are covered in the document:

- The validity of Popular Education today
- Essential principles of Popular Education
- Fe y Alegría as a Popular Education Movement
- Popular Education within the educational approach of Fe y Alegría
- From the community to the public sphere

We specifically invite the EvalParticipativa community to consult the document and respond to it from a participatory evaluation perspective. We would also like to extend this document's final invitation to the community as a way of continuing the conversation, always keeping in mind a global perspective as we pursue the end goal of achieving the common good in the local educational settings where we are. We strengthen the option for the vulnerable majority, seeking to improve our 'earthly city' without losing sight of the transcendence of our work.

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Originally published 12 October 2021

# Evaluation and Participation in Humanitarian Action: Contributions to the Debate from Latin America

by *Alcides Gussi, Marcia Braz and Regislany Morais*

The contemporary debate on evaluation and participation in humanitarian action is particularly prominent in Latin America. Multiple and diverse humanitarian contexts, crisis types and humanitarian responses exist in the



region. It is also home to several study centres and researchers who discuss participation.

This is unsurprising given that the region is the birthplace for major theoretical influences on the topic. Moreover, professional evaluator networks have been established where highly diverse evaluation perspectives are shared, contributing significantly to the construction of knowledge and emphases given in the field of evaluation.

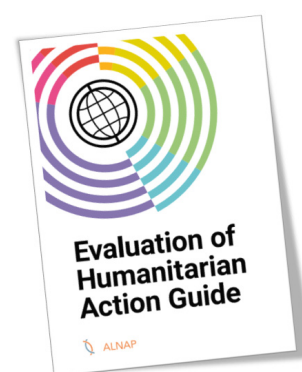
All this context strengthens a rich exchange of knowledge and experience on humanitarian action, evaluation and participation in Latin America. In this article, we will briefly introduce these concepts and invite those interested to get involved in the work developed in Brazil by the Humanitarian Action Evaluation Studies Group.

We will start with the concept of **humanitarian action**. One of the most widely accepted definitions is presented by Abrisketa & Armiño (2002), available in the [Dictionary of Humanitarian Action and Development Cooperation](#). However, there is no absolute definition that has been agreed upon by the entire humanitarian community and this is due to the complexity surrounding this field, its activities, stakeholders and the objectives

it covers. What exists is a common goal of 'saving lives and alleviating suffering' (Piñeda & Rodríguez, 2012.p.14).

The complexity involved in defining humanitarian action extends to the practice of its **evaluation**. Humanitarian action evaluation needs to consider the specific complexities of each situation in addition to the response's goals (often generic), the urgent need for action, insecurity and access issues, polarised contexts, populations that are suffering from trauma, and other unique aspects that are characteristic of the field.

In the [Guide for Humanitarian Action Evaluation](#) (ALNAP, 2016), evaluation is defined as a *'systematic and objective review of a humanitarian response to determine the value or significance of an activity, policy or programme, with the intention of extracting lessons so that policies and practices are improved and accountability strengthened'* (ALNAP, 2016, p. 27). This concept is influenced by the definition of evaluation and its criteria disseminated by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).



However, experience-based lessons, such as those taken from the evaluation of humanitarian aid provided in Rwanda in the 1990s, require those working in humanitarian action to take into account specific characteristics of this field and incorporate other evaluation criteria specific to its needs such as relevance, efficiency, connectivity, coherence, effectiveness, impact, coverage and coordination.



In terms of objectives, humanitarian action evaluations focus on achieving two central objectives: learning and accountability. Learning is defined as a process in which a humanitarian response experience, and posterior reflection on it, generate changes in actions, improvements and lessons that are incorporated into future responses. In turn, accountability is the means by which *'power is exercised responsibly'* (ALNAP, 2016). The organisation has to be accountable to external institutions (donors and others), the organisation's management and stakeholders who benefit from its actions.

Accountability is a major topic in the discussion on evaluation and participation in humanitarian action, both due to the need to justify the effectiveness and efficiency of

resource use when accounting for activities before donors; and to fulfil its commitment to present the results of actions to all stakeholders concerned, especially those affected by humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, a growing discourse has developed on the importance of the **participation** of individuals in decisions that affect their lives. This is supported by a surge of initiatives to improve the quality and responsibility of humanitarian actions that have surfaced since the 1990s, as set out in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability](#) and [Accountability Commitments to Affected Persons](#). Hence, participation features strongly in humanitarian sector speeches and standards.

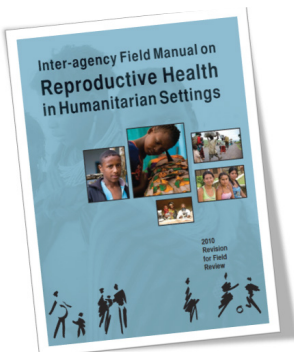
Brown & Donini (2014) point to some notions of participation in important humanitarian action documents, such as:



- *'The involvement of affected people in one or more phases of the humanitarian response cycle'* (document [Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action](#) – ALNAP & URD, 2003);



- *'Listening to and responding to the comments of affected people'* ([The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership](#))2013); and



- *'stakeholder participation is key in all aspects of a programme'* ([Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health](#) in Crisis, 2011).

A study by Morais (2020) recognised that the concept of participation in humanitarian action is understood broadly. Rather than there being a single definition, there are various degrees of participation in local initiatives that range from passive to emancipatory. Participation is a goal that humanitarian organisations seek to attain and this desire translates into international commitments and standards that guide humanitarian organisations to achieve better results.

Taking into account the three concepts outlined briefly above, it is important to encourage a debate on evaluation practice that establishes a dialogue between the goals of humanitarian action; a respect for human rights; and the participation of, and commitment to involve, affected groups in decisions that affect their lives. The scope of the evaluation needs to be expanded beyond a traditional approach that focuses merely on results and impact, to take into account the challenges involved in conducting evaluations in varied and complex humanitarian contexts.

It is also necessary to take into account the capacities and skills of the evaluators working in these contexts, ensuring that, in addition to being knowledgeable about evaluation and participation theories and methodologies, they establish dialogue with populations affected by humanitarian crises and can access prior knowledge regarding the context, the problems faced and relationship dynamics that exist.

The practice of humanitarian action evaluation has its own particularities due to the nature of the field, which requires professionals to have knowledge and skills that go beyond technical qualifications. Humanitarian action evaluations require a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the concepts and principles governing humanitarian action, the guidelines and regulations that guide work in this field, and above all, the ability to address complex and multi-factorial issues that arise in the context of disasters and armed conflict. Humanitarian action is a significant field of specialisation for evaluation professionals around the world.

In order to contribute to the training of evaluators, and to the discussion around humanitarian action evaluations and participation in Latin America, the Humanitarian Action Evaluation Studies Group was created in 2021, an initiative by the Multidisciplinary Core of Public Policy Evaluation – NUMAPP, at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), in partnership with the Culture of Evaluation outreach project at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The Group's work is structured around a cycle of activities addressing three central topics – Participation, Evaluation and Humanitarian Action – and has started by gathering and building knowledge and practices that have emerged on evaluation and participation in Latin America.

In its first year, the **Participation and Evaluation in Humanitarian Action** training cycle was developed with the aim of fostering debate on the participation of people and communities affected by humanitarian crises in evaluation practices through 10 thematic sessions and workshops, led by invited national and international coordinators and experts. This cycle sought to stimulate dialogue around standards and documents concerning humanitarian action evaluation and share the experiences of professionals and evaluators working in humanitarian contexts. The group plans to expand its work by creating an Observatory of Participatory Evaluation Practices in humanitarian contexts in Latin America, to begin its activities in 2022.

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# Reflecting on a Research Methodology Involving Beneficiaries in Participatory Evaluation

by *Kylie L. Kingston*

My participatory evaluation research journey was sparked by a motivation to involve young children, as the beneficiaries of an educational program, in evaluating their pre-school program. I wanted children to have the opportunity to participate in designing and using evaluation processes, so as to have their voice heard and to impact on programs and activities they were involved in.

Subsequently, this motivation broadened to include beneficiaries of any age and led to my masters and PhD research in which I sought to understand beneficiaries' perspectives on participating in evaluating nonprofit organisations. After all, if beneficiaries don't want to be involved in evaluation processes, requiring them to be is unlikely to be a useful, empowering or voice-giving experience.

Findings from my masters research indicated that beneficiaries indeed do want to be involved in evaluating programs provided by nonprofit organisation that they access. Of importance though is matching the way beneficiaries participate within the organisation (in relation to the programs they use and their timeframe of engagement) to the evaluation approach and processes. Further details about these findings and frameworks for participatory evaluation can be found in these two journal publications that stemmed from this research – Kingston, Furneaux, de Zwaan, and Alderman (2020a & 2020b). Extending these findings, my current PhD research seeks to further understand participative evaluation from the beneficiaries' perspective.

In total, I have interviewed 31 beneficiaries (and additional employees and board members) across four different Australian nonprofit organisations. These organisations, ranging from small to large sizes, include those that provide community services such

HAVE YOU EVER  
WONDERED  
WHAT OUR VIEWS  
ARE ON  
PARTICIPATORY  
EVALUATION?



as health and rehabilitation support, housing advice and relief from social isolation, as well as professional membership support. When I reflected upon these interviews as a whole, the significance of talking with beneficiary stakeholders became apparent. Often research is done on beneficiaries and evaluation practices are developed for beneficiaries to use, rather than being developed *with* beneficiaries.

Along with co-authors, I have written about the importance of researching with beneficiaries in a recently published journal article titled "[A Reflection on Critical Methodology: Accountability and beneficiary participative evaluation in Third Sector Research](#)" in *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. In that article, which focuses on the methodology used in my masters research, we discuss how the inclusion of beneficiaries in empirical research enabled their voices to be heard firstly in the research itself and secondly through the evaluation processes developed as a result of the research. We discuss how beneficiaries' voices heard through the research process informed the development of participatory evaluation processes to be used within the nonprofit organisations ongoingly.

Within the *Voluntas* article, we identify three levels that researchers can consider when designing methodology for research projects that aim to empower and give voice to beneficiaries: the *conceptual*, *processual*, and *reflexive* levels. The conceptual level considers the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the research, while the processual level considers the research methods, which in our example are case studies involving interviews with beneficiaries. We highlight here how interviewing beneficiaries became a means of representing this group within nonprofit research. "Finally, the reflexive level explores how findings from the processual level enable praxis through the development of approaches supporting beneficiaries' participation in organisational evaluation processes. As such...research can engage beneficiary participation, in order to promote more effective beneficiary participation organisationally" (Kingston, Luke, Furneaux, & Alderman, 2021, p. 1).

My research motivation was to understand beneficiaries' perspectives on participatory evaluation, and based upon those perspectives, to develop processes for their involvement. In this way beneficiaries can continue being heard through participatory evaluation processes. I hope the *Voluntas* article makes clear that beneficiaries' involvement in research on participatory evaluation has supported their engagement with evaluation at an organisational level. The three levels of methodological design (conceptual, processual and reflexive) may be helpful for others designing research who seek to include marginal stakeholder groups, such as beneficiaries of nonprofit organisations, and enable them to have a stronger evaluative voice.

**Kylie Kingston** is a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology(QUT) in the School of Accountancy and with the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies. Her research explores the participation of beneficiaries in evaluation processes of nonprofit organisations as a way to increase accountability toward them. Kylie is particularly interested in the inclusion of beneficiaries in evaluation so as to increase their voice and ability to have an impact upon programs. Kylie is also an editor for the Evaluation Journal of Australasia and has written many articles on participatory evaluation. [https://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Kingston,\\_Kylie.html](https://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Kingston,_Kylie.html).

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Originally published 20 September 2021

# Empowerment Evaluation: New Materials at EvalParticipativa



by *EvalParticipativa Team*

As outlined in the [planned activities](#) for EvalParticipativa's second stage, we are keen to keep adding to the RESOURCES section of our community of practice and learning.

As our colleagues and friends already know, the section already hosts a wide variety of testimonial videos, guides and manuals, tools, case studies and significant lessons. We highlight new and updated material that we add to the repository on our social networks, [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#): another reason to follow us online!

In this post, we want to highlight four recent additions to the [Guides and Manuals section](#). They all share a clear theme: the **empowerment evaluation** approach. Although participatory evaluation is the general or umbrella term that refers to stakeholder involvement in evaluation processes in Latin America, the same is not true in the Anglo-Saxon context, where nuances between different evaluation approaches that include or involve stakeholders are more commonly accentuated.

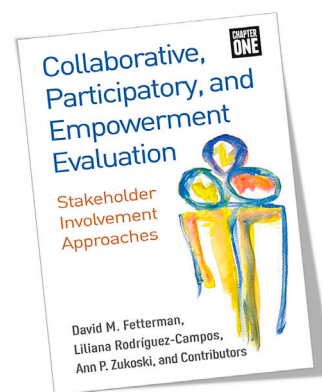
David Fetterman is a strong proponent of distinguishing between the subtleties of approaches. He has pioneered and encouraged the use of empowerment evaluation, and believes there is much value in highlighting the particularities of each approach. In the same vein, a chapter of our handbook [Sowing & Harvesting](#) is dedicated to introducing several of these approaches, and we have also published articles on this platform such as Brad Cousin's [Collaborative approaches to evaluation](#) and [Emma Rotondo's Stakeholder empowerment in evaluation](#).

The materials we wish to highlight today focus in different ways on empowerment evaluation. We will now summarise them below so that potential readers can be aware of their contributions.

The first and only one in [Spanish is \*Evaluación participativa del empoderamiento juvenil con grupos de jóvenes\* \(Participatory evaluation of youth empowerment in youth groups. Cases analysis.](#) The article reveals how young people's interpretations of their own realities are key to understanding their actions and behaviours and key for adapting social and educational projects and programmes to new social dynamics. The article analyses these interpretations in four participatory evaluation processes with 42 young people aged between 14 and 25 years old in 4 Spanish cities.

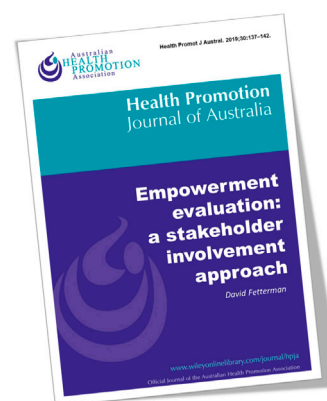


The second, [An introduction to collaborative, participatory and empowerment evaluation approaches](#) is the introductory chapter of a book that presents the theory and practice of collaborative, participatory and empowerment evaluations; all evaluation approaches that involve stakeholder participation.

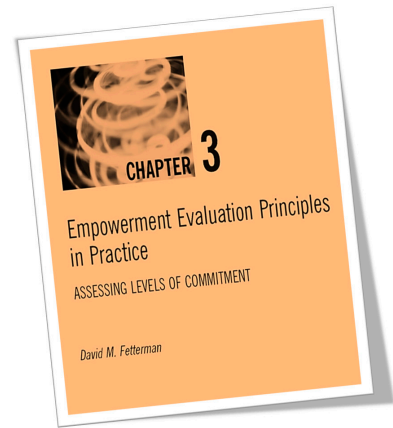


This chapter outlines characteristics unique to each, and how they are addressed and understood in the Anglo-Saxon evaluation field.

The third contribution is the article [Empowerment evaluation: A stakeholder involvement approach](#), which introduces empowerment evaluation in a succinct manner and emphasises how it involves the use of concepts, techniques and evaluation findings aimed at promoting stakeholder improvement and self-determination. It is carried out by community and programme staff members, with the assistance of a professional evaluator. The approach aims to increase the likelihood of programmes achieving results by increasing the capacity of programme stakeholders to plan, implement and evaluate their own programmes.



Finally, the chapter [Empowerment evaluation: principles in practice. Assessing levels of commitment](#), argues that as evaluation practice means applying the principles to real-world situations, the reality of practice is disorderly and often full of nuances, compromise, and inherent tensions. The chapter discusses how the principles of empowerment evaluation guide the practice of this evaluation type. The principles include (1) improvement, (2) community ownership, (3) inclusion, (4) democratic participation, (5) social justice, (6) community knowledge (knowledge closely related to practice), (7) evidence-based strategies (e.g., interventions, practices), (8) capacity development, (9) organisational learning, and (10) accountability.



We trust that you will find these materials enlightening and that they will help our practices to continually integrate these principles and objectives.

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Originally published 13 September 2021

# Systematisation Of Experiences And Evaluation: Similarities and Differences



by *Oscar Jara Holliday*

Let us take as starting point the fact that both evaluation and systematisation are susceptible of being perceived as having different approaches and conceptions. Therefore, we should not worry about having close and unique definitions of them but instead aspire to find some fundamental guiding criteria, particularly with a focus on being able to apply said criteria to our concrete work and not wear ourselves out in the attempt to find abstract formulations.

The first thing we can affirm is that in general, in the fields of education, organization, community outreach and development, we work with a basis on projects that, depending on how we approach them, formulate aims, strategic objectives, both general and specific; goals to be achieved, as well as results, effects and impacts that are expected; they define components, activity plans, people in charge of realising them, indicators, schedules; sources and means of verification, products, necessary resources, potential risks, budget; mechanisms of monitoring, project follow-up and evaluation, etc. These projects are normally structured around a specific planning logic based on a diagnosis or preliminary study, a formulation of the institutional mission and vision, and other elements. This logic and its instruments are usually a fundamental reference for the evaluations that rely on them.

But from the very moment that a project is set in motion, a new component arises: a process. This process depends primarily on how the people involved in the execution of the project interpret it and feel about it as well as on how they act and how they interact among one another. This process, then, emerges as a vital component of the project and, without a doubt, unexpected elements that could not have been anticipated or planned ahead will appear in its course; therein lie its richness and importance.

The framework of the project will continue to be a reference point but it is the process in motion what will dictate the specific dynamic and direction: both hindering and facilitating factors will appear, some of which will come from elements external to the project (context, specific situations in which it is placed, the dynamics of relations among participants, etc.) while other factors will come from the project's own dynamic. There will appear synergies that will boost and speed up the actions beyond initial expectations but there will also come up hurdles along the way that will hinder the progress. The project's logic is always more lineal and prescriptive; the process's is more complex, dynamic and unpredictable.

That is why we affirm as main point, that there must be a dynamic and synergistic relation between project and process (that is to say a relation in which each element affects the other in such a way that they result in an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects).

From this central point we can better understand exactly how evaluation and systematisation of experiences contribute as factors of learning through practice.

- Evaluation is closely related to the project and its completion. Systematisation of experiences is more related to the process, its dynamic, its path and its vitality: a view from and on the lived experience.
- Evaluation (regardless of type and approach) will always entail a value judgement, whereas systematisation's objective is to recover the practices and learning generated within it so as to acknowledge the views that are generated from the perspective of the various stakeholders without necessarily passing judgement.
- In order to express a value judgement, evaluation requires a contrast to be established, within an institutional framework, between what was expected to achieve with a project and what was ultimately achieved. Systematisation can incorporate other dimensions that came up during the process and which might have no further relation to the institutional proposal that boosted the project.
- The majority of evaluations are carried out with the aim of providing information for decision making. This can sometimes result in them being primarily administrative, immersed in an approach focused on control and supervision rather than on the production of learning, especially when they are developed as external evaluations. This in turn can bring on attitudes that make some subjects get on the defensive for fear of an upcoming judgement and its implications.

- Systematisation of experiences tends to be freer of those administrative restraints and allows people to approach its practice with a more critical, self-critical and reflexive attitude, and willing to learn from what took place in the experience.
- The pace can also be very different. Many evaluations are very limited by time due to the need to present reports and make decisions based on pre-established periods. Systematisation of experiences, with a perspective more oriented towards the problematisation and the understanding of the stakeholders' lived experiences by recovering their knowledge and their views, can be slower and may not be subject to such strict progress monitoring along the way. Rather, it builds a cumulative organizational learning beyond the projects' periods.
- Due to its origin and some of its characteristics related to its use as a component for validating projects funded by governmental and non-governmental bodies alike, evaluation has developed into a professional specialization field. So much so that there are professional evaluators and even national and regional associations of these specialists. On the other hand, systematisation has emerged rather as a component integrated to the processes promoted by the stakeholders and although there are many people who do consulting work in this field, none of them would consider themselves a professional systematiser.
- Evaluation allows the gathering of vital information about the results, something which systematisation generally does not provide. In turn, this information and the balance supplied by evaluation are crucial for the reorientation of the projects and future actions. It is also essential to form value judgements about the goals, results, effects and impacts actually obtained, as well as on the reasons behind its achievements and its failures in order to correct or reaffirm what should be done. This marks the importance of evaluation.

Bearing all this in mind, we need evaluation as much as we do systematisation of experiences. And rather than worry about the abstract differences between them, we should focus on how to create, in the concrete practice of our projects and processes, the conditions for a fruitful, complementary and synergic encounter between these two exercises for producing knowledge from practice; an encounter that allows us to turn them into educational facts and critical learning factors with which to strengthen our skills in strategic projection and practice improvement.

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**Oscar Jara Holliday** is a sociologist and public educator. He is the director of the Alforja CEP (Centre for Studies and Publications) in Costa Rica and President of the Popular Education Council of Latin America and the Caribbean, CEAAL.

We use the term "systematisation of experiences" as process of reflection and critical interpretation of lived experiences to generate meaningful learning from practice. This goes beyond "systematising information", which is limited to organising, classifying and cataloguing data.

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# Similarities between Systematisation of Experiences and Evaluation



by *Olga Nirenberg*

As I mentioned in my brief comment on the article published the 22nd of March on EvalParticipativa, "[Systematisation of Experiences and Evaluation: Similarities and Differences](#)", by Oscar Jara Holliday, my first reaction upon reading it was of surprise. I felt it was paradoxical that certain arguments regarding evaluation would appear on the blog on Participatory Evaluation, it seemed like an oxymoron, a contradiction in itself.

I am familiar with the works published by the author of the article, OJH, which are widely known and have been of great influence on those of us who work in evaluation in Hispanic American countries. I have even had the opportunity to debate directly with him on the resemblance between systematisation and evaluation. Our conversation was very important to me, so much so that in the book I published shortly after (Nirenberg, 2013) I included a chapter (chapter 8) dedicated almost entirely to systematisation of experiences in which I highlighted its points of contact with non-traditional evaluation approaches.

Although I have acquainted myself with the approach and methodologies of systematisation of experiences and have even put them into practice in many occasions, here I will discuss mainly the references to evaluation present in the cited article, since that has been, for more years than I would like to admit, the central focus of my professional career.

I am very grateful to my colleagues and coordinators of EvalParticipativa, Pablo Rodriguez-Bilella and Esteban Tapella ([PETAS](#)/National University of San Juan, Argentina) and Carlos Sanz ([DEval](#)), for giving me the opportunity to expand and enrich this debate.

## Evaluation, its purpose and its usefulness

Evaluation is a systematic and programmed reflection that is carried out using quality information (trustworthy, relevant, up to date) in order to generate, through comparisons and reasoned evaluative judgements, useful and viable recommendations to improve the action and thus its results. These reflections refer to the action that has already been taken, to the one in progress or to the one expected to be taken (Nirenberg, 2013).

I would like to reiterate something I have mentioned in various publications, and with the backing of several colleagues, which is that evaluation does not have one purpose alone but at least three main ones:

- to learn from practice,
- to improve intervention programming and management, and
- to achieve transparency in intervention management.

I therefore disagree with the article's claim that the goal of learning belongs to systematisation and that it is what differentiates it from evaluation. On the contrary, my view is that this aim is shared by both systematisation and evaluation. At this point I state my opinion on the relation between the usefulness of evaluation and systematisation: they both contribute to the goal of learning in order to transform the situations of reality that are problematic or unsatisfactory. That is, they both lay the knowledge for the transformative action.

## Evaluation in accordance with stages, focuses and who carries it out

We should remember that evaluation deals with different **stages and focuses**, which can sometimes be recognised as such, in the form of a time sequence, but more frequently present themselves as conceptual moments, in the form of a logical sequence, which means focuses may overlap, for example, during ex-post evaluation, when attention is also placed on other moments and focuses. In short, they are:

- Diagnostic evaluation or baseline, with a focus on the initial problematic situation and its context.
- Ex-ante evaluation, with a focus on the formulation or design of the intervention.
- Mid-term evaluation, during the intervention and with a focus on the processes (activities).

- Ex-post or final evaluation, with a focus on the results or effects (both expected and unexpected).

Those moments interact, affect each other and, as mentioned before, can overlap, in many cases acting as inputs to one another. In the referenced article only the evaluation focused on results is mentioned and the only results taken into consideration are programmed ones, as if the evaluation was not required to investigate the effects that were neither programmed nor expected, whether positive or negative. I insist, even if the only evaluation is carried out at the end of an intervention, the other moments (diagnosis, design, implementation records) are taken into account in order to provide greater explanatory power to the conclusions (judgements) and foundation to the evaluative recommendations.

The article also fails to differentiate between types of evaluation according to who conducts it: external, internal, self-assessment, participatory evaluation. Each of these types or modalities has advantages and disadvantages, that is why I always recommend the use of synergetic combinations, which introduces a fifth type of evaluation, one that was brought to my attention by my late colleague and friend Mario Robirosa and which he called "mixed evaluation". In many occasions I have suggested combining moments of self-evaluation with others of external evaluation so that the findings yielded by the former can serve as relevant input for the latter. The same can happen with systematisation.

Regarding self-assessment (a modality I have worked on for a decade), it is often criticised for requiring stakeholders to be both the judge and the defendant at the same time. However, I want to emphasise that its advantages reside precisely in the fact that it is the protagonists of the action the ones who carry out the methodical and systematic reflections on their own performances and results, thus learning from their achievements and failures. This in turn will allow them to propose improvements. And these will most likely be more viable and effective than improvements requested or imposed by headquarters or external evaluators.

To me, all of this testifies to the relation between self-evaluation and participatory evaluation, in which the protagonists of the different stages of the evaluative process are those who have taken part, in one way or another, in the formulation and implementation. And I dare say self-evaluation and participatory evaluation are the ones that share the most points of contact with systematisation. It is because of this that I see the claims in Jara's article as an invitation to debate on what is evaluation and what separates it from systematisation. In this spirit, I would like to analyse other polemical points in his article.

## Judgements, comparisons, recommendations and turbulence

I agree that evaluation always formulates **reasoned evaluative judgement** and that perhaps that might be a difference with systematisation, but I do not agree with the remark about those judgements being related only with the results. Although evaluation is very much concerned with effectiveness (the degree to which the programmed results are achieved), it also deals with non-programmed effects and takes into consideration other dimensions, especially the processes that took place during the intervention as this allows comprehension and explanation of the results that were achieved (whether programmed or not).

Those judgements are formulated as answers to evaluative questions. In that sense, evaluation follows the Socratic method, which dates back to the fourth century BC and that consists of asking the right questions about something and afterwards debating the answers through argumentation, evidence and reasoning. It is through debate (nowadays we would call it intersubjectivity) that we get to build new knowledge with which to answer the questions that were posed and thus perform better. This does not mean that I am unaware that knowledge is necessary but not sufficient to perform well, as Socrates did believe. Today it is clear that motivation and an axiological framework are also needed.

Oscar Jara makes a valid point when he states that in order to pass reasoned evaluative judgements it is necessary to make **comparisons** and that characterises evaluation. However, to this I would add that these comparisons are not drawn concerning exclusively the objectives and goals set out during the design of the project, but rather they are drawn concerning mainly the diagnosis or baseline and the problematic situations that were detected and prioritised, all the while leaning on a theory of change (theoretical framework).

Comparisons of the outcomes are drawn with different parameters in mind:

- Initial situation ⇒ baseline ⇒ comparison without counterfactual analysis ⇒ "before-after".
- Objectives and goals that were set.
- Norms and standards in other contexts (national average, protocols).
- Other similar interventions in the same context or a comparable one.
- A similar control group but one where the intervention was not carried out.

In evaluation focused on processes, the main consideration is the project implementation, their modalities, the allotted time, the sequences, the inputs that were used, the outputs and scope obtained, as well as the advancement (institutionalisation and expansion) of the processes that took place. Both the intrinsic or contextual factors that favour the management as well as those that hamper it and call for reprogramming are analysed. Although these are the emphases, enquiry into the effects that take place during the course of the action is not left aside. At this evaluative stage, the prime comparisons are made contrasting with:

- The theory of change or formulated strategy.
- Present theoretical currents about the specific topic.
- The consideration of ethical and axiological matters both general and specific to the topic.
- The project design (activities, project leaders, schedule, expected scope and outputs, assigned inputs).
- The initial situation and its context reflected on the diagnosis, including the mapping of stakeholders and resources.
- The changes to the initial situation and its context that occurred during the implementation and that brought about reprogramming.
- Other interventions, other similar or of the same "family" (eg, national clusters, policies or programmes implemented in different locations).

I also disagree with the statement that evaluation finishes with the reasoned evaluative judgements. Although they are indeed a crucial element, I have always insisted that every evaluation should finish with **recommendations for future action** based on those judgements.

Evaluative judgements are similar to conclusions in the field of research and I reiterate that they are usually either answers to questions (or hypotheses confirmations) previously posed or unexpected findings that were encountered along the line of enquiry (*Serendipity*). If it only encompassed judgement, evaluation would be similar to controlling or auditing for accountability. But it has been at least three decades since evaluation moved on from that.

I believe recommendations are an important intersection of evaluation and planning. They reflect the learning achieved during the evaluative process and they facilitate

reprogramming, which in turns helps to improve management. The design of the intervention, its initial formulation, is a road map that guides the actions and I agree with OJH that they are contrasted with the situation in the field.

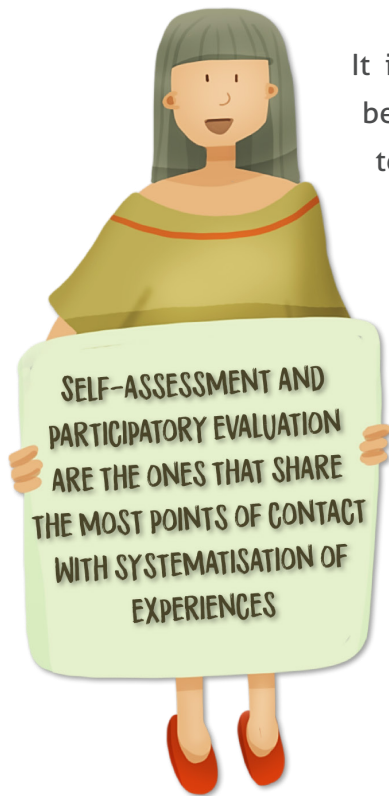
But to think that what has been programmed at the beginning is static or linear is to be unacquainted with the flexible modalities of strategic and participatory lines of planning. Formulation does not happen once and for the entire duration of the implementation, but rather there must be constant planning since it is known that throughout its different stages there is a need for operational programming or reprogramming in accordance with changing contexts. Once again I think of Robirosa, as he would use, since at least thirty years ago, the term "turbulence" to characterise the contexts in which interventions are carried out (Robirosa et al, 1990; Robirosa, 2014).

## Methodological rigour and triangulation

There is consensus among evaluators on the importance of obtaining **quality information** (trustworthy, relevant, up to date) to back the evaluative judgements of the action and its outcomes. This includes the testimonies of the stakeholders involved, of those who took part at different moments of the intervention and particularly of the beneficiaries, but at the same time, the implemented records and other relevant quantitative and qualitative data should also be taken into consideration.

At this point it is worth highlighting that an important procedure, although not the only one, to achieve both the trustworthiness of the information and the methodological rigour of the evaluation is **triangulation**. With it, the main aim is to reduce individual subjectivity through intersubjectivity by including diverse subjects or different points of view. Evaluation usually triangulates:

- Types of evaluation (based on who evaluates and on moments or focus).
- Quantitative and qualitative approaches.
- Different techniques.
- Different sources of information.
- Different indicators for the same phenomena.
- Different comparative parameters.
- Multiple stakeholders.
- Different disciplines.



It is the **methodological rigour** where the greatest similarity between evaluation and investigation lies. The use of qualitative techniques, such as group dynamics and interviews, and of appropriate, play-based tools is another link that connects evaluation with systematisation.

## Participatory evaluation and systematisation of experiences

To highlight the main points of the conceptualisation of participatory evaluation and reflect, without the need for further arguments, what the points of contact with systematisation of experiences are, a very useful resource is the recent publication "[Sowing and Harvest. A Handbook for Participatory Evaluation](#)" (Tapella et al., 2021). Below I cite the seven principles which that modality is based upon.

1. The relevant stakeholders of the intervention or situation that is to be evaluated are actively and consciously incorporated to the evaluative process as rights-holders.
2. Local knowledge is recognised as valid and necessary knowledge for the management.
3. The institutional representatives work in association with the local stakeholders in the design, implementation and interpretation of the evaluative findings.
4. The use of didactic techniques and materials facilitates dialogue by generating spaces and procedures for the recollection, analysis and use of the information.
5. The participating stakeholders or interested parties take ownership of both the processes and the results of the evaluation.
6. The evaluative process strengthens the local competences in planning and participatory decision making.
7. The external agents act as facilitators of the processes of management and evaluation.

Without a doubt, there are great challenges in building multi-stakeholder spaces where genuine participation can take place and that generate true areas of equality in order to achieve a deeper action-oriented knowledge that is aimed at the action to improve

or overcome problematic situations. It is really worth reading this manual to better understand the connections between participatory evaluation and systematisation of experiences.

## Evaluation and systematisation: an example

At the beginning I stated that I would not meddle with the procedures of systematisation. However, I want to finish this article with an from an intervention that I coordinated myself in which systematisation was a relevant step and input for the evaluation.. With this I do not mean to say that systematisation is always a stage of or input for evaluation.

I am referring to the [IACE method for school self-assessment](#) that was developed and implemented from 2007 to 2017, in 3245 schools of the three compulsory levels of education in seven provinces in the north-east and north-west of Argentina. The development and implementation of this method of self-assessment was made possible by the cooperation of UNICEF Argentina through agreements with the Local Development Support Centre ([CEADEL](#)), of which I am a member, and the ministries of those provinces (Nirenberg, 2018 y 2019).

This method promotes the central role of head teachers, teachers, students and their relatives. This allows them to work on indentifying and prioritising the prevailing problems in their respective schools, by jointly doing a series of evaluative exercises, and afterwards tackle the formulation of an action plan for overcoming the prioritised problems which is implemented and monitored during the following year.

One of the steps in the method consists of the systematisation of the processes designed in each school during self-assessment and the implementation of the action plan. To do this, they process and analyse the records that were set for monitoring which are triangulated with group dynamics with the stakeholders involved and interviews with the head teachers.

This product, apart from serving as a document of the memory and the learning for the members of each institution, is integrated and made available for each jurisdiction. This integration is one of the prime inputs to the evaluation of evaluative interventions and of action plans implementations. Thus, the aim is not only to improve the management of each school but to have an effect on the education policies of the provinces, which introduces a change in the direction of the processes of policy fomulation: from the bottom up. The first two links appearing below lead to additional information on this case.

**Olga Nirenberg** is from Argentina and has a PhD in Social Sciences (UBA, 2005) and a diploma in Public Health (UBA, 1976). She is an executive member of the Local Development Support Centre (CEADEL) and has developed the Self-Assessment Tool for Education Quality (IACE) for public schools (UNICEF-CEADEL). She was a programme consultant at UNICEF, the ARCOR Foundation and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, Argentina). At PAHO Washington, she evaluated the Comprehensive Adolescent Health Plan of Action for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the programmes "Reduction of Health Care Disparities in HIV Prevention and Treatment in LAC" and "Prevention of HIV in Adolescents and the Youth in LAC with a Focus on Human Rights". She was a World Health Organization (Geneva) consultant on participatory programmes on adolescence and an evaluator at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in LAC. She is a lecturer and a theses and extension projects evaluator for universities in Argentina and Latin America. She writes on social planning and evaluation.

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# MEANINGFUL LEARNINGS



# Why is Participation Important in Evaluation? Lessons from an Experience in Mexico

by *Giovanna Montagner, Gabriela Pérez Yarahuán, Erick Herrera Galván, Karla Pinel Valerio and Oliver Peña Habib*



We would like to contribute to the experience exchange taking place in this community of practice by sharing with you the evaluation process that the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results Latin America and the Caribbean ([CLEARLAC](#)) has carried out in collaboration with the Walmart Mexico Foundation and its partner organisations for the Smallholder Market Access Program. We will also share our thoughts on using qualitative methods to capture the perspectives of program participants on the change processes in which they participate.

## The context

The agricultural market in Mexico is characterised by its structural exclusion of smallholder farmers, contributing to persistent high levels of rural poverty and an uncompetitive market with major inequalities between stakeholders in the value chains and a dependency on intermediaries who take a significant proportion of the final product price.

## The intervention

The program works to facilitate the access of small fruit and vegetable farmers to these value chains by offering services that integrate training and development of market

linkages for farmers organizations in different states of Mexico. These services aim to increase farmers' income, facilitating improvements in both the quality and quantity of produce. They also help them formalise farmers organisations and link them to the supply chains of large-scale purchasers without relying on intermediaries.

The programme, run by TechnoServe since 2011, works with three types of partners, who all contribute to meeting these aims:

- Agri food businesses and large scale retailers who partake in the program by buying directly from the small holder farmers groups;
- "Social-purpose" intermediaries who help arrange sales at fair prices for farmers lacking the conditions or the interest to organise themselves;
- NGOs and businesses who receive advice and support from the program to replicate or adapt its model.

## The evaluation

Between 2018 and 2020, CLEAR LAC conducted a phased evaluation process to support the scaling-up of the intervention model with a focus on market transformations.

We realised very quickly that traditional evaluation approaches would be limited in how successful they could be in fulfilling this aim and that it would be necessary to work in a participatory manner with program managers and staff. We therefore held a workshop to draw up the evaluation agenda and questions in a collaborative manner, maintaining constant dialogue throughout the evaluation process.

One of the stages of this process was a qualitative outcome evaluation, aimed at analysing the program's contribution to transforming the Mexican agricultural market so that it could become more inclusive, resilient and sustainable. In order to do this, we turned to program participants and gathered their perspectives on the changes that the programme had helped bring about, whether positive or negative, intentional or not, direct or indirect.

Using an adaptation of [Outcome Harvesting](#), we conducted telephone interviews with the leaders of participant farmer group about the most significant changes that they had experienced thanks to the program, how their perception of themselves had changed both as individuals and as a group , what their five-year vision was, what challenges they still faced and what additional support they needed. Following this, we did a field visit to a sample of five farmers groups to reconstruct their change pathways through a dynamic timeline exercises with the groups' leadership teams, individual interviews with farmers and non-structured observation. We also held semi-structured interviews with



representatives from implementing organisations, “social-purpose” intermediaries and purchasing departments from participant companies. In these interviews, we asked them what they are doing differently and about their thoughts on the program’s intervention model.

By doing this, we were able to identify the progress and areas of opportunity of the program from the perspectives of the farmers and other stakeholders, as well as to facilitate their use as an input for decision-making regarding the program’s future. This process led to a few surprises.

For example, one of the changes most frequently reported by the farmers was the way their organisations were strengthened with the program’s support. This was despite the fact that this was not one of the formal components of the initiative but rather informal advice provided by field staff. Based on this finding, we discussed with the program staff how to systematise the experience of the field staff supporting farmers organizations and create a component especially

dedicated to this, which would benefit the farmers that will join the programme in the future.

The evaluation process ended with a series of working groups that had the aim of strengthening the intervention model and planning the next stage of the program based on the evaluation findings and recommendations. The participants included the program’s staff as well as representatives from partner organisations.

This experience taught us the **following lessons:**

**1. Opening up spaces for dialogue and listening can be an entry point for participatory evaluation.** Full participation in all evaluation stages was not possible as the program does not operate with a participatory approach. Furthermore, there were logistical challenges due to the geographical distribution of farmers groups and also security issues. However, it was the first time that the voices of the smallholder farmers were heard systematically and factored into decision-making processes. This was not only valuable for the program, but also for the farmers themselves, some of whom shared that they had really appreciated the fact that their opinion had been taken into consideration. The same thing happened as we interviewed implementing organisations, purchasing companies and “social-purpose” intermediaries.

**2. The different perspectives of stakeholders are key to evaluating complex initiatives with transformational aims**, as they shed light on factors that facilitate or hinder change processes in different contexts. By doing so, it is possible to identify opportunities to build alliances and diversified intervention models.

**3. Qualitative methodologies are essential to the evaluator's toolkit but often their use is limited to extracting information in the data collection phase.** To avoid this, evaluation designs need to include "process uses" and establish how the evaluation findings will be fed back to the participants.

**4. The qualitative evidence resulting from participatory processes can be helpful in explaining the findings from quantitative evaluations.** This study used data and findings from a quantitative evaluation that the programme had already carried out internally. We used this to analyse the changes that the farmers groups had experienced with a rigorous analytical sampling, which allowed us to understand why some groups had achieved greater results in improving their income, productivity and adopting good practice. The findings derived from dialogue with the farmers groups allowed us to understand the interaction of various factors in their change pathways, which explained the diversified results that were observed in the quantitative evaluation.

**5. Finally, this experience changed our perspective regarding how to evaluate.** Our previous experience focused on the external evaluations of governmental programs, which in Mexico use standardised terms of reference, often with limited possibilities for participatory processes. In this evaluation, instead, CLEAR took on the role of "learning partner", supporting the programme all the way from the definition of the evaluation objectives and questions to the use of findings and recommendations. This also meant that the evaluation was more useful as the process was adapted along the way according to the changing needs of the program.

We hope you find these lessons useful and we invite you to share your comments and thoughts in the [Virtual Forum](#) or in the comments section below. We are especially interested in hearing your thoughts on these questions:

*What opportunities are there for linking participatory approaches to other methods and approaches, for example, complex system perspectives and quantitative evaluations?*



*In your experience, what potential does participatory evaluation have to facilitate transformative initiatives?*

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# Evaluating with Rights-holders. Lessons from the Updated Human Rights Appraisal in Mexico City

by *Marcia Itzel Checa*

It is increasingly common to hear of participatory evaluations that give leading roles to a large range of actors affected by a particular intervention. This allows evaluations to be carried out using a more comprehensive vision, one that recovers the different perspectives involved.

Likewise, Mexico City's Human Rights Appraisal and the Human Rights Programme associated

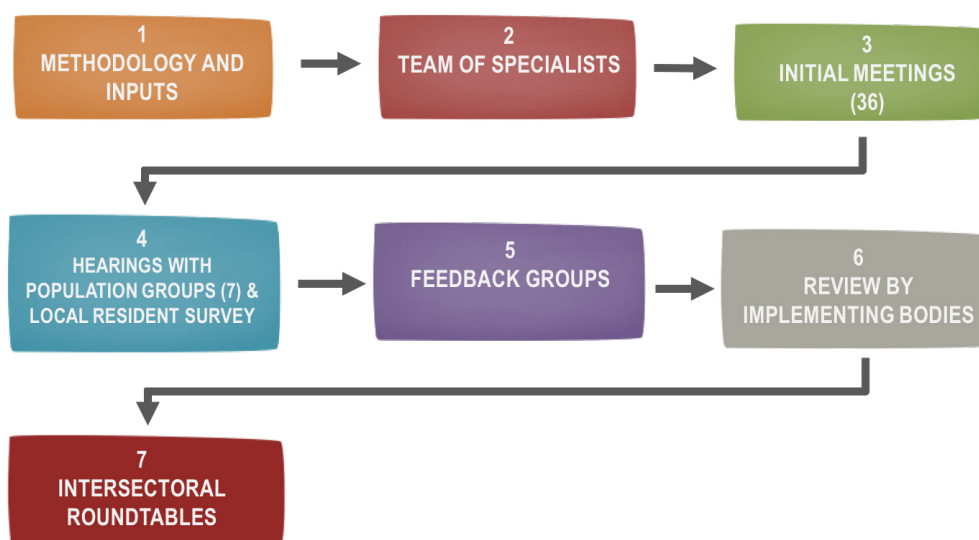
with it are one of a kind, for the following reasons: the broad participation of multiple political and social actors in the elaboration, execution, monitoring and evaluation stages; its institutional design, which has matured over time and has, indeed, been incorporated into the city's new constitution; and the fact that, despite its ups and downs, it has survived three periods of municipal government.

The first Mexico City Human Rights Appraisal was drafted in 2008.[1] It "identified the main obstacles that prevent people passing through or living in Mexico City from exercising and effectively enjoying human rights, [and] the degree to which the public authorities have fulfilled their obligations in the matter."[2] This formed the basis for the implementation of the Mexico City Human Rights Programme (PDHDF in Spanish) presented one year later (2009)[3], and updated by law in 2016.[4]

In 2015, the PDHDF Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (CSyE in Spanish)[5] initiated the process of updating both instruments (the Appraisal and the Programme), using a participatory evaluation methodology that assessed the situation of 19 rights and 11 population groups,[6] alongside the principal actions of the relevant municipal authorities.



The following diagram illustrates in broad terms the route agreed by the members of the PDHDF Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. It is coordinated by the Executive Secretariat of the PDHDF monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism of the PDHDF is formed by the Evaluation Committee, the Executive Secretariat of the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism -which is the technical body and which implements the decisions taken by the Committee- and the participation spaces established to monitor the PDHDF.



Source: Prepared by the author using information from the Executive Secretariat of the PDHDF's monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The methodology opted for a mixed method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative data. For the former, the statistical information recorded in the Human Rights Appraisal (2008) on the status of the 25 rights and population groups covered was updated, providing a baseline for analysing the situation. In other words, the process identified any improvements or setbacks with regard to the enjoyment of rights. Given that changes to the context are not all the direct result of the 2009 Human Rights Programme, the actions of the 67 public institutions responsible for one or more of the 2,413 lines of action were registered.

The qualitative research included different exercises focused on obtaining a broader overview of the human rights situation in Mexico City, the contributions made (or not made) by the PDHDF, and any adjustments and priorities that its new version should consider. Thirty specialists participated in the process, each with responsibility for one right or population group and for drafting the initial version of the relevant chapter. This

work was based on the quantitative information mentioned above and on information provided in initial meetings, hearings and roundtables.}

The process started with 36 *initial meetings* for which four key areas had been identified for discussion: 1) the most significant concerns and issues vis à vis the right or population group in question; 2) progress made, according to the perspectives of the different participants; 3) challenges to fulfilling human rights obligations; and 4) proposals for strategic actions. In these meetings, governmental institutions responsible for implementing the PDHDF participated in a horizontal way with organisations working on the right or population group concerned, specialists, members of the CSyE and the Executive Secretariat.

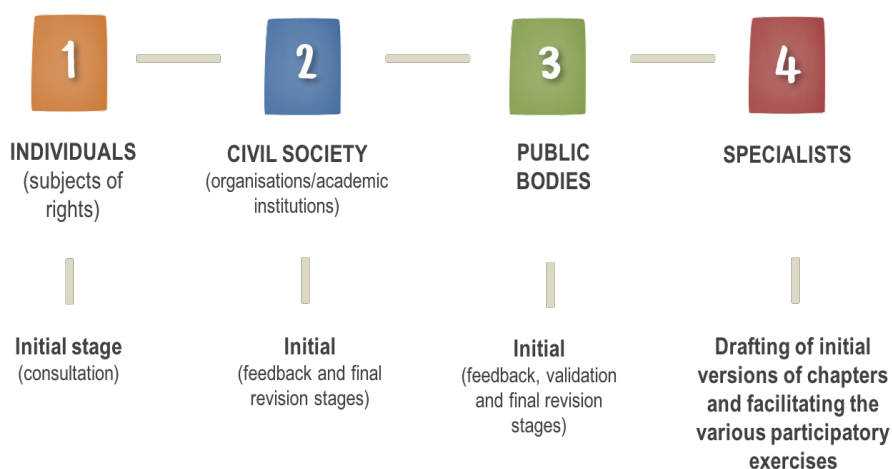
In addition, *seven hearings, consultations and focus groups* were held with population groups that have suffered historical discrimination and that did not directly participate in the initial meetings. These were: street dwellers (one mixed group and one exclusively made up of women); children and young people; persons with pre-release status and families of persons deprived of their liberty in reintegration centres; and migrants, refugees and deportees. Suitable methodologies for dialogue were created for each specific group in collaboration with other organisations. The results were systematised by the Executive Secretariat and submitted to the respective specialist for their incorporation in the draft version of each chapter.

On this basis, the initial versions of each of the 30 chapters of the 2016 Appraisal and Programme were drafted and then shared in *feedback groups*, in which all the actors who participated in the initial meetings were involved. These sessions were organised to enable participants to evaluate and provide feedback on the findings and contents of the Appraisal. This process was complemented by *review groups* made up exclusively of the 30 governmental bodies that would be responsible for the subsequent implementation of the strategies and actions proposed in the updated programme, principally to provide an opportunity to determine its viability[7]. Finally, *intersectoral sessions* were held for each right and population group, in which government institutions, civil society representatives and the PDHDF Monitoring and Evaluation Committee participated.

These exercises took place between August 2015 and August 2016 and involved 30 public institutions, 3 judicial bodies, 6 political-administrative organs, 2 autonomous entities, 89 civil society organisations, 4 academic institutions, 2 international organisations, 204 participants in the hearings, 30 specialists, and all members of the CSyE. They were coordinated by the Executive Secretariat of the PDHDF's monitoring and evaluation mechanism[8].

## WHO PARTICIPATED?

Establishment of the participatory methodology by the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, created with intersectoral input.



Coordinated by the Executive Secretary of the MSyE of the PDHDF

### Lessons learned

- Consideration should be given to the fact that participation takes more time than expected when the dynamics of government are involved. Therefore, it is a good idea to establish the scope of each exercise from the beginning and to provide ample time for implementation, in order to avoid generating false expectations.
- Be aware that each kind of actor requires specific participation mechanisms. For example, hearings with rights-holders involved more flexible modes of discussion than those conducted with government agencies. Thus, methodologies need to be developed that are tailored to each objective.
- Building trust is an important part of encouraging participation and ensuring subsequent use of the evaluation. In this sense, the involvement of specialists who were acceptable to the different actors allowed the Appraisal and the Programme to register the perspectives of the participating actors and ensure acceptance of the final results.
- Give human rights-holders a leading role throughout the process. Although this was a key focus of the process, their highest levels of participation occurred during the first stage, aimed at identifying issues and needs. Participation was lower in the stage dedicated to defining the indicators that would be used to monitor the strategies and lines of action defined jointly with the public institutions.

Finally —right from its beginnings in 2008— this initiative has sought to develop an innovative approach to institutional policy within the human rights framework. This has

now been transformed into a Comprehensive Human Rights System intended to permeate the policy work of the Planning Institute and the Evaluation Council, established by the First Constitution of Mexico City[9].

The third update of this important effort is due in 2022. This will provide a valuable opportunity to evaluate the results of the process in terms of the exercise of the rights of people who live in or pass through Mexico City. It has the potential to generate citizen ownership as a tool for demanding rights.

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**Marcia Itzel Checa** has been involved with several civil society organisation projects in the areas of electoral observation, citizen participation, civil society strengthening, transparency, accountability, and gender and human rights. She was selected as Executive Secretary of the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism of the Mexico City Human Rights Programme by public tender. She is a founding member of the Mexican National Academy of Evaluators (ACEVAL), chairing the Board of Directors from April 2019 to June 2021. She co-coordinates the EVAL Human Rights group within the Latin American and Caribbean Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization Network (RELAC) and currently serves as General Coordinator of the Observatory of Public Appointments, which promotes Article 19 and has established the Centre for Analysis and Research.

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- [1] A mandate derived from the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), which established an important international precedent for strengthening observance of the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a watershed for operationalising human rights in government actions, programmes and policies.
- [2] Coordinating Committee for the elaboration of the Mexico City Human Rights Diagnostic and Programme. Mexico City Diagnostic of Human Rights, 2008, p. 27. Only available in Spanish at this [link](#).
- [3] See (in Spanish) this [document](#).
- [4] According to the Law on the PDHDF (approved in 2011), this public policy instrument should be updated every six years to adapt and reformulate the set of strategies and measures proposed. It indicates that this process "should be inclusive, progressive and multidisciplinary and ... ensure broad participation of civil society organisations, academic institutions and public bodies." See [articles 13 and 14](#) of the Law (in Spanish).
- [5] Composed of the three governing bodies of Mexico City (executive, legislative and judicial), four civil society organisations and three academic institutions, each with voice and vote. The Mexico City Human Rights Commission and the Mexico Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights were included as permanent observers, with voice.
- [6] The rights and population groups developed were: 1) access to information; 2) human rights defence; 3) equality and non-discrimination; 4) freedom of expression; 5) politics; 6) water and sanitation; 7) food; 8) cultural rights; 9) education; 10) healthy environment; 11) freedom of movement; 12) risk prevention and reduction; 13) health; 14) sexual and reproductive health; 15) labour and human rights at work; 16) adequate housing; 17) access to justice; 18) due process; 19) personal integrity, liberty and security; 20) indigenous peoples and communities; 21) youth; 22) women; 23) children and young people; 24) older people; 25) people living with disabilities; 26) migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers; 27) persons deprived of liberty in reintegration centres; 28) victims of trafficking and [other] forms of exploitation; 29) street dwellers; and 30) the LGBTI population. This includes five more categories than in the version carried out in 2008 and 2009, namely the rights to defend human rights, food, cultural rights, mobility and risk prevention and reduction.
- [7] For example, by delimiting and imparting greater methodological rigour to the approaches. The PDHDF had 2,413 lines of action, while the updated version prioritised 582, and provided indicators to make monitoring easier.
- [8] The Updated Mexico City Diagnostic and Programme that resulted from these initiatives can be found (in Spanish) at this [link](#).
- [9] See the [Constitution in Spanish at this link](#).

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# Principles from Feminist Participatory Evaluation in Colombia

by *Alexandra Santillana, Fabiola Amariles and Ana Isabel Arenas*

This experience, which took place between May and November 2018, was not strictly speaking a participatory evaluation, but provides reflection on some lessons learned from applying principles from feminist evaluation and participatory methods in rural development community projects. This pilot was run within the framework of a conventional evaluation led by the Canadian Ministry of Global Affairs (GAC).

Inspired by Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)<sup>1</sup> and taking advantage of an evaluation already underway as part of the Canadian cooperation program in Colombia, a mixed team of evaluators was formed including Canadian and Colombian specialists to design and implement the pilot.

The evaluation team identified some participatory methods for collecting the data (the Most Significant Change Technique and Outcome Mapping) with a gender focus to enable participation by the project beneficiaries and related organisations. The team organised workshops and reflective debates with stakeholders involved in the projects. The workshops, differentiated by gender, focused on the changes taking place in the communities thanks to the project, especially those related to the care economy, financial independence and the empowerment of women and girls.

After collecting and analysing the data, participatory workshops were organised to validate the findings as the first stage in sharing back the information with those involved. These workshops were facilitated by local evaluators and allowed stakeholders to reflect on the findings and contribute to developing learning products. The content and format of these products was defined by the same implementation agencies and



project participants. Infographics were created for the implementation agencies whilst the project participants preferred a teaching pamphlet format.

## Lessons

The team was made up of members from both the north and south and this also contributed to ensuring that the evaluation took into consideration gender, local power attitudes and dynamics in addition to institutional biases and influences.

Other factors that contributed to this learning included the open and receptive attitude of the Canadian evaluation team members who took on the role of learner, delegating the feminist reflection design as a contribution to the evaluation and taking on board cultural recommendations with regard to organising and running the pilot experience.

As feminist evaluation requires that the project is highly participatory and inclusive, a key factor to achieve this was to insist that the implementing agencies invite “stakeholders who are difficult to access”. This meant that they needed to facilitate transport and accommodation so that the women and men from the project’s target areas could travel from their different rural areas to participate in the workshops and reflective debates in the city. The result was that a far greater number of participants were gathered

## Lessons learned from designing the pilot exercise

Feminist evaluation critically examines those who participate in the evaluations, how they evaluate and how their contributions are valued.

Designing this exercise revealed some lessons that the evaluation team and Canadian cooperation evaluative processes could take away:

- *Including the project management group (implementing agency)* as a main contributor for collecting data at the beginning and end of the process meant that this group grew in empathy and more readily owned the results. The group also recognised that the feminist reflections had taught them to strengthen strategies and results by seeking gender equity and equality in the project.
- *Validating findings and feeding back information.* The exercise of validating findings made it easier for those who contributed information to the evaluation to own the findings when feedback was given.

## Lessons taken from the tools, participatory process methods

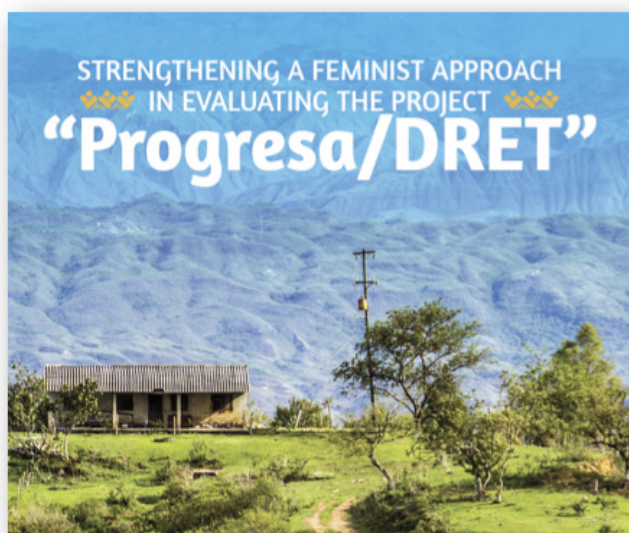
- *Separating men and women in the focus groups* for small group work and for sharing results back to the larger group guarantees that all opinions are expressed. It has been demonstrated that when reflection is carried out in mixed small groups, women tend to participate much less and end up accepting the opinion of the men in the group. These methodologies contribute to equal opportunities for both women and men to express their opinions so that women's voices are taken into account.
- *Using "Outcomes Mapping (OM)" and "the Most Significant Change (MSC)" tools and protocols* was useful for detecting changes that resulted from the project, whether intentional or not and as advocacy tools. For example, the MSC allowed us to detect more accurately qualitative changes that were taking place in the women's lives. Likewise, stakeholder analysis using the OM tool made it possible to visualise impact strategies with these stakeholders with regard to gender equity and equality and women's rights in the region's rural sector.
- *Learning products created*, which describe the feminist evaluation approach and findings and which were co-created by the project participants. The resulting leaflets and posters went on to become tools used later in advocacy work for gender issues in the project's area of influence.

## Recommendations

We would like to highlight a few aspects which are valid for future evaluations.

- *The relevance of incorporating the feminist approach in the participatory reflection process*, establishing and applying gender-differentiated criteria in these development processes which underline and advance women's skills and the effects of the project to empower women.
- *Generating trust and fostering the conditions to achieve institutional and community political will in the evaluation process*, facilitates the gathering of direct information, and the identification of both positive aspects and difficulties presented in the execution of the project and its overcoming.
- *Direct dialogue and opinion exchange with the various process agents*, management and operational institutional staff, both those responsible for the process and participate in specific areas and the women and men who participate and express their own opinions.

- Specify the most significant change or transformation with regard to gender to inspire the developed project. In addition to the aforementioned, it is worth highlighting the significant changes that occur regarding the sexual division of labour, financial independence for the women and their greater participation in decision-making moments and a greater awareness among the men of the need to transform relationships between women and men.



This leaflet is one of the experience's learning products. It contains a description of the project and participatory reflection process. It also suggests stages of participatory methods to strengthen feminist evaluation and a set of criteria that differentiate gender analysis.

You can download the document by clicking on the image.

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**María Alexandra Santillana** was born in Peru and now lives in Canada. Alexandra began her career in evaluations in the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) in Lima, Peru. She supervised monitoring and evaluation for projects aimed at developing the private sector in the region. Since September 2017, Alexandra has been the principal evaluator in the International Assistance evaluations team on behalf of the Ministry of Global Affairs, Canada (Ottawa). She designs and implements evaluations aimed at Canadian cooperation programs in Latin America and the Middle East.

**Fabiola Amariles Erazo** was born in Cali, Colombia. She is an economist at University del Valle and has a masters in Economics from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. She has ample experience working in economic and social development projects in low resource communities including internal and external evaluation processes and incorporating a gender approach and feminist analysis into these processes. She is an independent consultant and works both nationally and internationally. Publicado originalmente el 29 octubre, 2020

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[1] In recent years, Canadian Cooperation has been applying and promoting its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) with the object of eradicating poverty and constructing a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world. Canada firmly believes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most efficient approach to achieve this objective.

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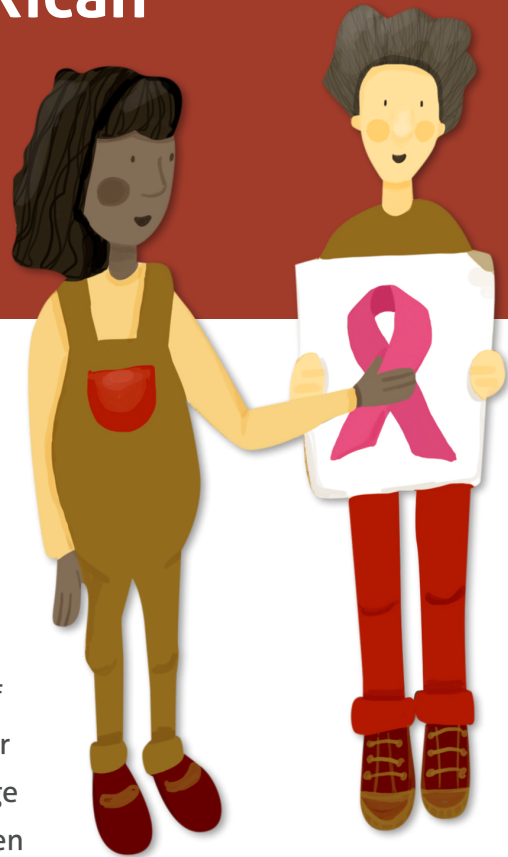
# More Significant Learning from Participatory Evaluation. This Time from the Costa Rican Caribbean

by *Karla Salazar Sánchez*

The Costa Rican Caribbean is known for its lush green landscapes, beautiful beaches and friendly people. But, unfortunately, it also stands out for its high incidence rates for various kinds of cancer. This prompted the region's Health Boards (local bodies who monitor the quality of health services) to request an evaluation of cancer care and prevention services, taking advantage of the fact that at this time there was an open tender organised by the Costa Rica Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) and the German cooperation programme, FOCEVAL to support capacity strengthening in evaluation.

And so, the evaluation was carried out from July 2016 to February 2017 in a rural Caribbean town called *Valle de la Estrella*. The evaluation began with incredibly high aspirations for citizen participation. In other words, it did not consult or ask for opinions from various stakeholders but rather sought to provide the board members with evaluation tools so they could evaluate the cancer services themselves. Their role was that of protagonists; they were the evaluators.

Seven people from different areas of the Caribbean were added to the evaluation group. They were chosen due to the way they stood out for their contributions to community participation and strong commitment to the communities they worked with in a voluntary capacity. There was also a technical team who supported the process, made up of a main evaluator, a local facilitator and FOCEVAL, MIDEPLAN and Ombudsman representatives.



Therefore, the project was designed and executed by the evaluation team while the technical team collaborated with methodological consultancy and close support during each of the activities that took place on the field.

## **Main lessons**

The experience taught us a lot of lessons. This was one of the first times that the evaluation of a public service had been delegated to a group of community leaders that had not been previously involved with formal evaluations.

I cannot emphasize enough here the word “formal” because their knowledge of the context and strong connection with community activities requires constant evaluation of what has gone well and what could be improved in various services. However, they had never followed a rigorous methodology that would enable them to systematise results and take them to the authorities to support decision-making. In this sense, the evaluation was innovative because it valued contextual knowledge and the development of technical skills that could be used in the day to day.

Without a doubt, this method requires close technical support and this is where the facilitation role at local level is key to the evaluation. The facilitation body is the bridge between technical know-how and contextual knowledge. As its name suggests, it facilitates the process by seeking to translate formal knowledge to local knowledge and vice versa. In other words, it is not exclusively centred around rigorous procedures, but also promotes the use of local experience to generate an evaluation in line with the context’s needs.

However, the methodological issue should not be ignored because a report with valid data for decision-making could be expected. One of the most challenging aspects for the group was to put themselves in the shoes of the evaluator. Their role was that of evaluators and so they participated right from the stage of identifying the object of evaluation through to defining the recommendations. Other stages included designing the evaluation questions, collecting data and all other stages found in a traditional evaluation. However, at first the role they naturally took on was more similar to that of key informants as the team had never been in a similar process before and at first did not feel like they had the skills to do so.

To address this, local facilitation had to put in a continual effort to accompany them at every stage so that they would take on the correct role. How? By giving them the technical tools and by reminding them what their role was day by day. In order to do this,

they held weekly sessions over several months, in which they studied basic concepts and defined key issues such as the evaluation questions, the data collection instruments, etc. This process was also accompanied by the wider technical team and they held workshops which included everyone involved where they created and fine-tuned the evaluation design.

This difficulty was also reflected in the conclusions and recommendations stage of the evaluation. Here, the high levels of contextual knowledge versus the basic knowledge of evaluation meant that the dividing line between the findings and the team's perceptions was vague.

The data collection stage in interviews and focus groups in order to elaborate conclusions was complicated because once again the team lost sight of its role and acted as informants, seeking to reflect their thinking in the results and not necessarily that which stood out in the data. This led to several discussion sessions with the main aim of understanding the methodological process so that they wouldn't feel like their knowledge wasn't valued but rather that evaluation logic requires evaluators to follow other paths via a more abstract and rigorous route that goes beyond individual opinions.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that those facilitating the process need to support the evaluation team in the most empathetic and approachable way. We must remember that participatory evaluation does not seek to simply provide a results report but also equip a group of people with a better capacity to evaluate and therefore have more tools at its disposal when working in citizen participation contexts. In other words, it is necessary to break down the barrier between academic and popular knowledge because in these processes both are essential for reaching the desired results.

Taking this stance into account, it is necessary that those who facilitate the process are clear about this being one of their aims. Sometimes time pressures, budgets and rigorous methods make the process difficult for the facilitator. Going back to the idea of being a 'bridge', the local facilitation body should respond not only to the evaluation team but also the technical team, the different institutions involved and the financing organisation. This generates additional pressure which should be addressed again through communication, indicating in a transparent way how the evaluation process is progressing in line with the plan elaborated a priori. Furthermore, the abilities and limitations of the evaluation team should be recognised so that additional support can be requested whenever required.

## As conclusion

To conclude, the process demonstrates that **“YES, IT WORKS”** in capital letters, because despite all the doubts and fears, an evaluation was carried out and the results were enlightening in many ways. Local capacities were improved in terms of dissemination, not only of the results but also of the participatory process which was extended to various parts of the country to motivate other community organisations. It also served to strengthen and empower the health boards as well as other involved institutions leaving behind many lessons learned. One of these lessons was the fact that participatory evaluation is possible as long as there is a greater investment in resources in terms of time and money.

And that’s when it depends on the objectives: Are you seeking a quick external evaluation by experts to get fast results? Or do you want to use the evaluation to develop local capacity in the search for greater transparency and improvements in public policies? Are you looking to empower stakeholders who traditionally have been left out of the decision-making processes and strengthen citizen participation to support decisions with empirical contextual evidence? If you seek the latter, one of the best routes to follow is participatory evaluation, from the very beginning right to the very end.

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# Lessons Taken from the Working Group Experience in the Santa Teresa Informal Settlement (TECHO-Chile)

by *Fernanda Arriaza*

TECHO is an organisation that works in 19 Latin American countries and seeks to overcome the poverty experienced by millions of people living in informal settlements through

initiatives which unite the efforts of settlement dwellers and young volunteers. The Working Groups are spaces for training and popular education, decision-making and community networking with the active participation of settlement dwellers and TECHO volunteers. This works well firstly, because the people involved develop lessons through sharing and complementing the ideas and worldviews that each person or group brings. In other words, everybody is always learning and teaching something as part of a dialectical process. Secondly, because these lessons lead to ideas which should be planned, executed and evaluated and this requires decision-making in conjunction with different sectors and community groups.



## The evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to reveal how the Working Group worked in the Santa Teresa informal settlement and analyse its strengths and weaknesses from the viewpoint of the community stakeholders.

This experience took place in the Santa Teresa informal settlement, located in the San Bernardo area, south Santiago de Chile between July 2018 and March 2019. Those involved in this process were: settlement leaders and neighbours, volunteers who assist the community work and a team lent out by the institution.

A full and detailed report of this and other Working Group evaluations can be seen in the section [Experiences and cases of Participatory Evaluation](#). You can also see the video documentary on this case at this [link](#).

## Lessons

Over the last 20 years, TECHO has worked together with communities and its Working Groups have generated projects linked to housing, community infrastructure, education, work and community development. In some cases, they were evaluated using several different qualitative and quantitative methodologies, measuring satisfaction and levels of efficiency. However, these evaluations focused on the projects and not on the Working Group itself.

In this situation, it was critically important to analyse how this community action space worked, which, as previously mentioned, required joint participation and the co-construction of solutions. A participatory approach for the evaluation was the most appropriate for this context. Due to the fact that it could have wide regional implications and also the value placed on it as a tool to spark off transformations, it was of upmost importance to carry out an evaluation which was coherent with the meaning and practical application of the Working Group in a horizontal and co-responsible manner.

We started this process with two distinctive TECHO community features in mind: (1) all initiatives are highly participatory at all stages and (2) all settlement residents know about the Working Group.

Whilst we recognised the value the Working Groups have for being relevant and efficient at responding to the needs of the community, this recognition had not been confirmed in a participatory manner, managed by the community itself. This was evidenced by a generalised lack of knowledge among residents that the Working Group existed. In other words, they were not aware of when the Working Group began, what aims it pursued and who should be members. According to the residents, attending the Working Group was the responsibility of the steering group and its president.

This information was revealed as a result of bringing together all the involved stakeholders: residents, community leaders, volunteers and TECHO professionals. Another chapter to this story was able to be written thanks to the possibility of generating the right conditions so that those who had walked this path could reconstruct it again.

## Recommendations

For reasons of transparency, it is necessary to clearly define what the Working Group characteristics are and it is essential that this clarity is seen at all levels, from the institutional to the community residents. It is also recommended that the Working Group should be a space where leadership skills are truly strengthened among all those involved. This should be considered a priority for TECHO's current work in the area, but also, for all those convinced that organisation is the driving force for change.

In all TECHO initiatives, it is necessary that the Working Groups promote community communication based on trust and transparency so that healthy social harmony can be generated in the neighbourhood.

It is also necessary that the Working Groups themselves are the ones who take care of these essential points because the projects developed in the community should focus on building capacity in those who are involved in them. This means that in addition to responding to and seeking to provide a solution for a need prioritised by the community, each project also relies on the participation of the residents to manage each step in the process from the initial idea through to its evaluation.

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# OPERATIONAL APPROACHES AND TOOLS



# And What About Tools? Games and Instruments for Participatory Evaluation



by *Esteban Tapella and Pablo Rodríguez Bilella*

Participatory tools are increasingly valued in the field of evaluation whether for analysing reality, facilitating communication, constructing collective perspectives, stimulating creativity and facilitating decision-making, or even for quietening dominant voices to give space for shyer ones. A quick search in the EvalParticipativa [tools section](#) is enough to demonstrate that we have a rich supply of techniques and activity ideas. Yet, even though we have a vast array of tools, we do not always know how to use them well. Whilst there seems to be an instrument for every possible situation or goal, there is also the need to constantly modify them and design new customised tools to suit specific situations.

Everyone who has facilitated participatory processes has asked themselves at some point how to achieve maximum possible involvement from as many stakeholders as possible in the activities that we organise. And of course we have not always managed to achieve this! We believe that one of the challenges of participatory evaluation is to create spaces where real participation takes place and multiple stakeholders are the real protagonists in the evaluation agenda.

It is not enough to have a deep understanding of participatory evaluation. It is necessary to identify and use appropriate tools in each social and cultural context where the evaluation is held. These thoughts are a response to this challenge and we are going to share some ideas whilst hoping to provide a pathway for others which will emerge from this community of practice regarding the challenging task of selecting or creating the right tools to facilitate the evaluative process.

As we have expressed on the forum and on other sharing spaces, we could say that participatory evaluation in our region is inherited from our rich tradition which includes Popular Education, the Systematisation of Experiences and Participatory Action-Research. They share various points in common in addition to having their particular nuances and differences. These approaches share an important common core: they adhere to a liberating and transformative perspective of reality. This strong and deep foundation sustains and legitimises these initiatives at their core. One of the unique qualities inherent in these tools is that they emphasise the leading role of the most socially excluded stakeholders.

In our context, value is increasingly given to using participatory methodologies in educational processes and in the management and evaluation of programmes and projects. However, in many cases, the participatory games and techniques are used for little more than to motivate the group, 'break the ice', introduce ourselves to each other or include relaxing breaks between work sessions etc. We believe that participatory tools, and especially the games, should go beyond their recreational aim. In other words, participatory games and tools should not be seen as a form of entertainment or a way of "using up time" and should be used for more than purely motivational purposes. In turn, neither should they be turned into a mechanism that makes every participant assume a role that is far from their real one, taking them out of their reality to submerge them into a fantasy world.

If by using techniques and tools we are simply looking for "fun" ways to impart content and if by conducting the evaluation we are simply pretending to take on board the perspective of local actors, we are demeaning their use. In these cases, it is deplorable to think that these techniques are used in a manipulative fashion to make people endure processes imposed by external needs in entertaining ways. In this case, the distribution of power which participation should encourage is devalued.

Whilst the techniques and games are not the essence and heart of participatory evaluation in and of themselves, it is true that they are key and very relevant in participatory processes as they allow us to 'build together'.

In the participation context, this includes throwing your whole self into the didactic activity (not just your thoughts), creating exchanges which deepen individual and group knowledge, facilitating trust and fun ways of learning; all of which reflect and will have repercussions on the desired transformational direction.

Therefore, in order to understand participatory tools in a different way, we should ask ourselves how to deal with a complex term in an 'evaluative' way or 'with content'. This

requires previous knowledge obtained from professional participation and personal opinions and options in a participatory, horizontal and non-imposing way.

Most of the participatory tools that we use require participants to 'throw their whole selves in'. In other words, they have to act, discuss, argue and defend a posture regarding an intervention or situation that affects them.

For this, the participatory tools that we use, and especially those linked to evaluation, should try to reproduce as faithfully as possible the conditions where each situation unfolds.

The tools should deal with situations as diverse as the daily life of a family, group or community: the work of an advisor, professional or leader of a grassroots organisation; the way the market works; and the fight for different sector interests within society. In other words, the tools that we design should incorporate elements which have real affects on people's lives. Thus, the participants go beyond simply representing their own role to 'live the game', 'play their life' or 'play seriously'.

The tools should deal with situations as diverse as the daily life of a family, group or community: the work of an advisor, professional or leader of a grassroots organisation; the way the market works; and the fight for different sector interests within society. In other words, the tools that we design should incorporate elements which have real affects on people's lives. Thus, the participants go beyond simply representing their own role to 'live the game', 'play their life' or 'play seriously'.

We also believe that the games or tools that we use have to be able to create conditions with horizontal structures for us to communicate; express our feelings, experiences and knowledge; share our ideas and expectations; and learn about different topics and situations.

By doing this, we can revisit situations from our lives, our work and organisations. In this way, the game's rules facilitate exchange and create space to talk about complex topics which would not usually be discussed. The fact it is a game encourages the participants to join in and deal with difficult topics in such a way that everyone present actively participates.

Finally, it is important to reflect on what makes a process more dynamic in order to shape the 'key' which will open up space for communication and collective construction. In this example, we are referring to some kind of plot or healthy scheming which is inherent in all good games. This is simply a way to make the tool exactly that, an instrument which can be used in a participatory and democratic way to deal with topics which would otherwise be very difficult to address.

It is worthwhile pointing out that many of the games that we invent or adapt use the logic of 'competition' (horse race, lottery/bingo, card games, dice games etc.) This should be seen as a motivational factor and never the end goal. The games must stimulate 'cooperation' more than 'competition' and the idea that 'we all win' must be upheld.

As a final note, we believe that those who select, design and use participatory tools have a great responsibility. The most important factor in the role of someone who facilitates these processes is having an open and receptive attitude. Without this, no technique or game will work. Furthermore, we have to recognise that regardless of which tool we choose, we must get to know it well and know how to use it. This means being aware of its potential as well as its limits as not all tools are suitable for all situations, topics or contexts.

It is also important that the facilitator is prepared to manage multiple situations which can arise from using an experiential tool. By 'putting our whole selves in', people are investing part of their lives in the collective process.

For this reason, we must be respectful and careful not to generate situations beyond our scope especially if we do not have the professional means and resources to manage and contain difficult situations.

We would like to invite you to think about the tools that you have used and share your opinions in this post's comments. How have you used them? What experiences have you had? Did you attempt to create customised tools? What was the result?

During the first gathering of participatory evaluation experiences to be held in Quito in mid-November, we will dedicate a day to sharing tools and talking about their use in participatory evaluation processes. All contributions are more than welcome!

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# Let's Talk About Participatory Tools! Featured Material Available at EvalParticipativa



by *Esteban Tapella*

Those of us who have facilitated participatory processes, have at some point wondered what we need to do to achieve the highest degree of involvement possible, from as many stakeholders as possible, in the activities that we plan. One of the many challenges that surface when carrying out participatory evaluation is how to create spaces for real participation where multiple stakeholders can be true protagonists in the evaluation agenda. We know that this is not achieved only by understanding in depth participatory evaluation and the methodological steps, it is also necessary to identify and be able to handle appropriate tools for each social and cultural context where the evaluation is carried out.

The use of participatory tools is increasingly valued in the field of evaluation whether to analyse the reality, facilitate communication, build shared viewpoints, stimulate creativity, facilitate decision making or even decrease the volume of some voices in order to make space for quieter voices.

A person does not become a mechanic only because they receive a set of screwdrivers. And yet, even the most experienced mechanics cannot do their job properly without them. Participatory evaluation tools can only fulfill their purpose when we have an in-depth understanding of what it means to incorporate social participation.

The tools used are not what make the difference, but rather the open and respectful attitude that supports an evaluation process. This participatory conception of an evaluation assumes that everyone involved in an intervention has the right and possibility, even if

at times they require specific training, to be protagonists in evaluating the programme or project they have been involved in. With this methodological conception in mind, the use of participatory tools should be understood as a way to break down inhibitions and fears among participants so that a diversity of opinions can be captured in the most faithful way possible for each intervention wherever possible.

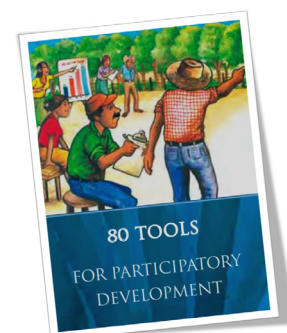
Whatever tools or instruments we use under this methodological conception, the evaluation should allow us to:

- share one's personal knowledge on the intervention, enrich it and boost collective knowledge concerning it;
- develop reflection on a shared point, in which participants contribute their particular experiences, broadening collective experience; and
- construct potential recommendations or solutions together for the problems identified, enabling everyone to participate in its design.

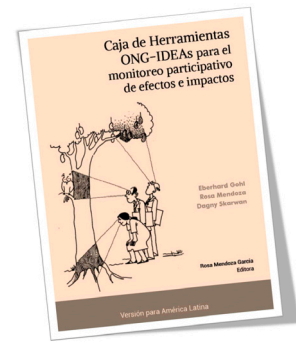
In this joint effort, different perceptions are shared on topics of interest from the intervention and on the assessment of its processes, results and impacts. It also hopes that the people involved take ownership of the methods and tools as well as the logic of the process so that the experience can be multiplied in their groups and communities. This converts the methodology into a process of empowerment for the different social actors involved and their organisations.

Today we have a valuable set of tools at our disposal, although we do not always know how to use them. And while there seems to be an instrument for every potential situation or purpose; we will, however, need to keep recreating them or designing new tools that are specifically tailored to new contexts. In this short article note we would like to introduce you to some of the most outstanding materials in our [toolbox](#), which contains more than fifty guides and manuals on the subject.

**80 TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT.** This document provides a set of tools to facilitate participatory processes, presented in a simple format with accessible language, easy to understand. In the style of a toolkit, it provides a wide variety of elements which can be used in group sessions, diagnostics, and participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation.



**TOOLBOX (ONG-IDEAS) FOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING OF EFFECTS AND IMPACTS.** This document (only in Spanish) is the result of applying the ONG-IDEAs ToolKit to the Latin America context and experiences. It uses concrete examples and concepts to show how the monitoring approach can be applied to strengthen the focus on effects and impacts and the participatory management focus.



**PARTICIPATORY TOOL MANUAL.** This manual (only in Spanish) brings together a set of participatory techniques and group activities applied and validated by the technical team and by the intervention communities of Proyecto JALDA (Bolivia). These techniques rely on the active participation of the communities involved. As far as possible, their actions are planned and carried out respecting the comprehensive and sustainable management of natural resources.



**PARTICIPATORY TOOLS FOR POPULAR EDUCATION (VOLUME I and VOLUME II).** This dynamic book (Volume II is currently available in Spanish only) reflects a set of techniques conceived in the Latin American context which can be applied in popular education projects. They promote the idea that participants should own, transform and improve their realities. Thus, it seeks to contribute to finding new alternative educational models to vertical education.



The second volume of the edition presents structural, economic, political and ideological analysis techniques in a clear and practical way for sociocultural activity coordinators.

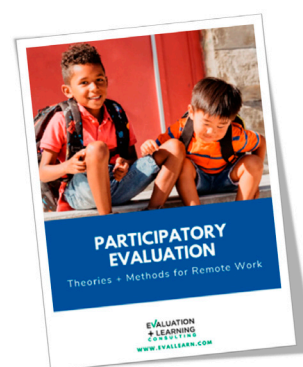
**TOOLKIT ON GENDER SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION METHODS.** This toolkit is based on the experience of using participatory tools in an evaluation context. It focuses on the feminist ethos of listening to women's voices and analysing the relationships of power within their lives. This set of tools allows us to conduct body mapping and resource mapping.



**IMAGE-BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION. TOOLS FOR LEARNING AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.** This document (only in Spanish) is based on audiovisual language to provide evidence of changes. It does this mainly from the perspective of the project's stakeholders, in this case the rural organisations and families. The text addresses the use of images in M&E and presents practical tools and guides for using media in adult education.



**PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION: THEORIES + METHODS FOR REMOTE WORK.** This guidebook identifies multiple resources for trends and innovations in participatory evaluation. It is unique in that it offers virtual adaptations of popular approaches to ideation, data collection and analysis, and action-taking for evaluators and human service organizations. This targeted research serves to support Evaluation + Learning Consulting's upcoming webinar series on participatory evaluation with a special lens on remote adaptations.



**TOOLS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION.** The democratic school must move towards the involvement of the entire educational community in the development of learning activities and in community life. It is about appealing to active involvement, participation and reflection from an inclusive leadership. Hence, educating critical citizens assumes and legitimises the most universal globalising function of a pedagogical project based on democratic dialogue, egalitarian participation and commitment to social transformation. This book (only in Spanish) offers a series of techniques to be used in different phases: (1) making a first contact and negotiation of the demand, (2) dynamising the diagnosis and shared analysis, (3) action planning, (4) implementation and systematisation of the experience, and (5) evaluation and dissemination of the project.



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# Meeting for a Common Cause: the Role of the Team in Participatory Evaluation

by *María Jesús Silva Rozas*

One of the main characteristics of participatory evaluation is that of forming evaluation teams which give local stakeholders the leading role.

It is precisely this local element which ensures that we have trustworthy knowledge about the reality we are evaluating. It incorporates experience from 'on the ground' with specific subject knowledge relevant to the evaluation. Making the local context central to the process brings the challenge to find a balance between the "[opportunity to participate with the capacity to participate](#)", enabling a harmonious development of various social, political and cultural experiences.

Many civil society organisations work with volunteers who are also part of their social action teams. [TECHO](#) aims to mobilise and train **young volunteers and community representatives** by working together to build a fairer, poverty-free society. To achieve this aim, three key actions have to be considered: (1) promote facilitating leaders for individual and collective transformation based on values of solidarity, conviction, diversity, optimism and excellence; (2) connect the greatest possible number of young volunteers and community representatives through activities which promote active and committed citizen participation; and (3) develop lessons and research and seek solutions for the human rights violation evident in settlements.

These key action areas present different types of challenges. For example, generational differences, gender roles, access to education, availability of time, personal and traditional



beliefs, work and leadership styles etc. For this reason, efforts should be concentrated on diversity and on how this can be used to construct better working processes. It is, therefore, infinitely necessary to clarify objectives and the different steps involved in each of the processes. Because we build better when we all play on the same pitch and follow the same rules of the game. The main thing is the sense of ownership required in the processes: *would evaluation be useful? and why do we want to be part of this team?*

Yes, evaluation is useful. Because we should value and recognise our experiences. Because we need to identify the role that each stakeholder has and how each lesson can be used. We also need to learn more about what motivates people to get involved throughout the process. We should, therefore, generate a shared language which enables us to approach communicative action with local knowledge, respect and the search for a collective goal. This language will enable us to create methodological and creative strategies which have been tailored to the local context so that we can better understand the object of the study and ensure that the results provide practical solutions for communities.

But, an isolated interest in evaluation is not sufficient. The people involved should want to be part of this team. For this reason, it is vitally important that we work with people connected to the area who feel that they belong and are committed to the local context. This guarantees that all action is rooted in the strengths and direct needs of each participant. By doing this, we hope that evaluation represents a process of significant community growth which can foster and result in social transformation. Being part of a participatory evaluation team means being part of a social transformation team.

Social action should be participatory. Likewise, popular education, participatory action-research and participatory evaluation invite us to re-evaluate what we know and how we can use it to further the cause. Therefore, our pitch should be flexible and our team diverse.

Recognising diversity when encouraging idea-sharing enables us to overcome boundaries; build more inclusive, democratic and sustainable social processes; and emphasise specific features involved in the new participation



scenarios in contexts where participation is limited or inexistent. In these situations, volunteers are valued as the main way of opening doors and overcoming obstacles.

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# Have You Asked Yourself What Your Role Is as a Facilitator in Change Processes That Are Driven by Our Initiatives?



by *Dagny Skarwan*

For around three years, I was involved in coordinating the project ONG-IDEAs with German and Latin American colleagues in Central America as well as NGOs in Colombia and Mexico. It was an experience that made a lasting impression on me.

For me, learning how to guide NGOs and facilitator groups in Participatory Evaluation processes and advising them on how to use tools to create a culture of evaluation in their target groups has been a great learning experience. It has also involved growth that has been charged with intense emotions and memories.

Going beyond the formal monitoring proposals (such as creating transparency and accountability), the participatory monitoring focus that we have developed at ONG – IDEAs includes our proposal to generate processes that empower and provide moments of learning for all those involved, focusing on the perspectives, self evaluation and commitment of target groups.

ONG-IDEAs' approach focuses on several tools that are able to generate information and enable analysis. They work when those who facilitate work together with those who are motivated and available to change their outlook, behaviour, attitudes and practices. It is important to clearly express what I want to change, what my objectives are, why I participate in the group or present an idea for a project.

For this reason, participatory monitoring prompts efficiency from individuals and groups as the tools allow objectives to be agreed and then measured whether individually or together as a group.



In the ONG-IDEAs project, we have trained facilitators – two per organisation – to learn about how to use the tools and how powerful this approach can be. We also help them decide if it is applicable and able to be tailored to their area of work, group context and specific project.

We have had several discussions with our German coordinator about the role of the facilitator because different NGOs have different ways of understanding what “*facilitating*” means.

We often observe that it has been understood as “*giving talks*” and “*going to teach*” whilst facilitation is not associated as often with “*listening instead of speaking*”. The ability to “listen” in a group setting means prioritising raising awareness, exchange, dialogue, learning and decision-making. It is about giving up power so that the group and those in it feel like they have leading roles.

In the ONG-IDEAs’ approach, a lot of emphasis is placed on facilitation being vitally important to generate conditions that are adequate for participation. Facilitators from some NGOs went on to “*empower*” more individuals from their organisation

One experience that stands out in my memory is the support I gave to a community health NGO on the concept of participatory monitoring and some tools they could use. Their facilitators were trained to then introduce the ideas to another group of 12 individuals from their field. It was a maternal and infant health project in Guatemala; more specifically, in indigenous communities with high levels of chronic malnutrition.

“What type of groups do you work with?”, I asked them and they answered “with breastfeeding mothers”, others said “with health workers”, “with community leaders”, “midwives”, “with the fathers”, “nurses”. Each facilitator had been assigned specific groups.

So, it was necessary to understand more about the way they approached each group of people: “Why does this project work to train all these different people and groups?”.

The response was “the same, that the maternal-infant mortality rate goes down and that there is an end to malnutrition”. “I see”, I commented, prompting further examination.

“And you, who works with breastfeeding mothers and a group of mother supporters, what are the objectives of those groups?”. “It’s the same, improve maternal-infant mortality, breastfeeding and malnutrition. We began this work with various groups in each community and a team that is very committed to this overall objective of lowering the maternal and infant mortality rate over three years. But we still want to go further.

I understand that we all have the same overall objective and so we should converge the efforts of several stakeholders to improve community health, each one in their role should and could make changes”.

In response to this explanation, I altered my question: “So you who works with the leaders, what changes do the leaders need to make in their leadership role to improve maternal-infant health? You, who runs the breastfeeding mothers group, if these women participate in the sessions over a period of time, what would motivate them to make changes, do they have any objectives of their own?”.

And so, finally each facilitator managed to think more specifically: could it be that those involved want to change or modify something in their own behaviours, practices or skills? Will it be the same for everyone?

It definitely wasn’t the same, but it wasn’t easy for the facilitators to identify what changes would be desired by the groups or individuals. For example, will the changes be the same in the first year as they are in the second? Will the community leaders desire the same changes as the health workers? Will the mothers want the same as the men?

When we talk about Theory of Change, we know that a logical framework with its indicators is key in deciding most project strategies and how resources are invested. In this session, we were able to reflect on each challenge each facilitator faced in their specific role and contribution and went on to understand the complex interrelationships in a set of social stakeholders who can contribute to or make difficult the attainment of objectives and change.

At this point, I remember that the facilitators learned something new. While they clearly knew what activities to do and they had done planning, were they as clear on the specific stages and sequence of change necessary for each target group so that others could also change in this complex system?

I kept on questioning and redirecting: “OK, but if you are the ones who are directing and training the groups, and if you don’t know what changes could be made based on this new founded knowledge, do you really think the people, leaders, health workers, breastfeeding mothers etc. are going to know? How and when are they going to decide on the changes and commit themselves to them?”

This led to a wonderful time of reflection! We broke down the Theory of Change piece by piece in order to locate where the work could be effective in the different groups. Where am I in this? And how is my role connected to the others?

Knowing how to ask the right questions to generate discussions based on the group's experiences opens up reflection and encourages interaction within the process. On this occasion, it was very clear to me that lessons on participatory monitoring cannot be "abstract".

In order to be able to use and facilitate the ONG-IDEAs tools well, the facilitators and team have to know "their place" within the project's change strategy and not only focus on the project's activities. Rather, it should be evaluated based on its effects and contribution. If I make it clear what a process of change is, my work as a facilitator will be focused in such a way that my contributions to the project are taken on board.

If the people involved don't propose change, it is less likely to happen. If the stakeholders or groups themselves are the ones who in line with their established aims and their own commitment are able to measure their own "self-efficiency", they are going to move towards their own goals and this is when participatory monitoring can achieve its purpose.

There are many things that I have learned that I wanted to share, but I will leave them for another time. At [ong-ideas.impact-plus.de](http://ong-ideas.impact-plus.de) you can find various documents that look at how participatory monitoring can be used for learning and empowerment.

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# Forum: Participatory Evaluation in Times of COVID 19: Possible or Wishful Thinking?



by *EvalParticipativa* Coordination Team

The year 2020 will turn, without a doubt, into a watershed year for multiple and diverse realities. While we are still in the middle of the pandemic, in contexts characterised by huge uncertainties, it is a good moment to reflect on the reality of evaluation in general and participatory evaluation in particular, especially in this long and extended moment that we are living through. This reflection often goes hand in hand with the (re)planning of activities and objectives that have been disrupted and troubled by lockdowns, illness and financial crisis.

The most diverse social intervention initiatives (projects, programmes, etc.) have been affected and several organisations have had to create or rethink guides and guidelines to accompany a new evaluation agenda. A quick search comes up with updated reports from [UNDP](#), a series of posts from the [World Bank evaluation office](#), recommendations on [monitoring, evaluation and learning within the framework of USAID](#), [UNODC guides for evaluation during the Covid 19 crisis](#), ONU Women and their [pocket tool for managing evaluation during the pandemic](#), Siempro (Argentina) and its [guide for public policy evaluation in situations of social isolation](#), proposals from BetterEvaluation to [adapt evaluation to Covid 19 times](#), etc.

As can be seen, reflection on what could or should be done has not been lacking in the field of evaluation since the start of the pandemic. However, there are **two** gaps in the discussion that we have detected and which seem relevant to us.

One refers to **what is being done effectively in evaluation in this context** (beyond the guides and various suggestions).

The other gap to be covered is linked to our community of practice and learning's specific interest, **what impact the pandemic is having on participatory evaluation practice.**

We want to invite you to think about these gaps in the debate and reflection and add your perspectives, knowledge and concerns in the comments below. We may have more questions to add but hopefully we will go beyond asking questions to at least venture to suggest plausible hypotheses as responses.

Well that's your invitation, now let's debate...!

#### 1. JESÚS FLORES JIMÉNEZ

Yes, of course, we must think of what can be done. We, as commissioners (subnational government), have been unable to make progress in certain projects of this kind of evaluation due to the eminent difficulty of participating in person, even the formality of administrative processes has been affected. I hope you can offer us some alternatives.

#### 2. CARMEN LUZ SANCHEZ

First of all, thank you for bringing up this subject, which I am sure puzzles many of us working in evaluation and has us trying to come up with alternative action plans.

In our specific case at Servicio País (Chile), we find ourselves in a reflexive process regarding certain topics on which it is about time we start making some decisions since we are nearing the end of the year and that forces us to act.

As a civil society body largely funded by the state, we have to decide on two core topics: 1) the feasibility of the evaluation planning that we did at the beginning of the year and how it could be adapted and carried out in this context of health emergency without putting the participants at risk. 2) How to respond to our prior evaluative commitments whose goals have been stated in agreements signed with funding ministries at the beginning of the year (in addition to this, these state entities are quite strict about meeting goals).

Both dilemmas are hard to solve. On the one hand, it is clear to us that our evaluation projects, especially the participatory ones, will be unable to be carried out following our usual methodologies and procedures. However, work in social intervention, particularly when related to communities in poverty and vulnerability, leaves little margin to adapt by the current technological means that can substitute a face-to-

face due to bad reception and little technological education in these communities. Plus, there is always uncertainty of how much participation can really take place through virtual media.

Anyway, I apologise if I have not offered solutions but rather shared many unsolved concerns but I believe this is what the epanemic is like and we might have to solve this together as we go. I am sure we will find space for innovation. If anyone in this beautiful community has solved these dilemmas, especially the one regarding the applicability of participatory evaluation during a pandemic, we will be very grateful.

Regards to all!

Carmen Luz Sánchez (Chile)

### 3. DAGNY SKARWAN

Has the ground shifted beneath us or have we changed our pace?

Thank you very much for opening the discussion. The questions posted on the forum make me reflect, although I think they might have sparked more questions rather than answers. Participatory evaluation has always been more challenging to design and conduct, and now, in COVID times, it is imperative that we keep up the commitment. But how do we achieve this?

Regarding the first of the two questions asked on the forum, "What is effectively being done in evaluation during the pandemic?", it is very likely that in the near future the pandemic will distort our lives for many months to come.

About the second question, "What impact does the pandemic have on participatory evaluation?", a few days ago I received some Terms of Reference with the invitation to come up with a proposal and an offer for evaluating a project led by a farmers' movement. I received the ToRs the 1st September and the offer had to be submitted by 6th September. It seemed quite rushed, so I wrote to the donor organisation inquiring why the deadline was so tight.

They informed me that due to the pandemic, the project implementation had been delayed, the project was now concluded, and thus they had to rush the evaluation to the end. The evaluation now has to be conducted under significant time pressure, as the evaluation report needs to be completed within three weeks. I should also mention that the ToRs specified that, following the principle of "do no harm", the entire process needed to be carried out virtually.

I understand very well the pressure to account to donors. But what can I, as an evaluator, do in this case if my evaluation principles require that the results should serve the communities? An evaluation approach beyond mere accountability implies aiming at empowerment and boosting the capacity to make independent decisions. Hence, here are some of my reflections from the perspective of the territories or spaces where the changes should manifest:

1. If we have lost time due to the pandemic, despite contractual pressures, then I believe that it is primarily the donor who has the opportunity to review their procedures. The evaluation design needs to be quite flexible, responding to dynamics rather than remaining strictly aligned with an evaluation matrix. Quality depends on flexibility, creativity, and sensitivity. Therefore, designs should consider more time rather than less! Responses will need to come faster!

2. It is very likely that the people involved, recipients, or beneficiaries now have "other concerns" beyond participating in "our project", which does not absolve us of the responsibility that participation is a right. More than ever, the evaluation design should lead us to consider the criterion of coherence. How well does the intervention or initiative fit the real contexts or contradictory situations? How valid are the visions of a theory of change in the current scenario?

3. I suggest an evaluation methodology that originates from the present and not from the project. It is the impact of the pandemic and its effects what will be primarily reflected in the perception of people or groups. Reflection with people, understanding how COVID has affected their well-being and that of their communities. What still works to give us encouragement? What makes us strong enough to overcome pain or negative effects? Are there any changes achieved in response to the pandemic that help us overcome the effects?

4. Instead of sticking to the original project design, we need to open up to virtuous circles that might have been mobilised. Has everything changed suddenly? If the pandemic deepens vulnerabilities and widens inequalities, should an evaluation during COVID not expand the range of options regarding the adaptability of these groups or territories?

5. Evaluators need to collect and generate data and information to answer evaluation questions. Perhaps in this crisis, it could be a challenge for participatory evaluation to ask ourselves the opposite: What data and information do we need to provide or facilitate to the community or groups so they can achieve their objectives, assess to what extent they managed to meet their goals, to make decisions, to recover, to adapt and to defend themselves?

6. Social distancing and virtual techniques have taken away or reduced the opportunity to interact. The need to know how to use virtual tools has arisen. We have been deprived of the chance to work face-to-face, so we need to explore how participatory evaluation can promote and what are now effective tools for interaction that motivate and facilitate self-assessment and analysis by the protagonists. Therefore, we should be even more aware of the use of evaluation, who it should serve, and how the process and results should be used!

Best regards to everyone,

Dagny Skarwan

#### 4. JUAN SANZ

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for opening and participating in this debate. This tremendous situation raises many doubts for me as well. However, there are several issues already on the table, so I will focus on offering some answers. I apologise in advance for any inaccuracies, but learning is what matters.

1. Evaluation, whether participatory or not, should be conducted when it helps to solve a problem or enhance a virtue. If the current situation affects the evaluation to the extent that it will cause more harm than benefit, I agree with Dagny and suggest to Jesús that it is better to postpone the evaluation. Keep in mind that forcing an evaluation or participation in evaluation under unsuitable conditions will not only influence its results but also undermine the credibility of future evaluations – and potential solutions.

2. Calu describes a situation where the funding entity demands that the commitment of conducting the evaluation be fulfilled. It is more than justified to appeal for administrative flexibility at this time, but we know that administrative procedures are, by definition, rigid. Thus, Servicio País and many other organisations in their situation will have no choice but to meet the deadline for an evaluation report.

3. I included the word “report” deliberately because my experience is that, although product, budget, and deadlines are usually non-negotiable, the evaluation process can offer some leeway. Here are some suggestions for navigating that leeway.

4. Firstly, leeway to avoid causing harm, as already mentioned in previous posts. There is no group dynamic whose benefit to the evaluation justifies risking the health of the participants and their environment. It is better to search through community meeting minutes, conduct telephone interviews, open WhatsApp groups...

5. Secondly, leeway to make evaluation resources available to those who need them. Many people may feel isolated, frustrated by their inability to contribute to community life, or have reduced their community interactions to much narrower circles than usual. Involving them, even by phone, in an evaluative process can be a very important lifeline. And this time, the priority should not be “what is communicated,” but rather the fact of being able to communicate.

6. Thirdly, leeway for experimentation. What would a WhatsApp group called “Evaluation Matrix” look like where one person facilitates a discussion to plan an inclusive evaluation, even if it takes several days? What about a TikTok video exchange where people express their experiences with the project? How would a summarised evaluation report broadcast on a community radio station look? You are much closer to the people you work with and surely have more and better ideas. Just as a few months ago we suggested experimenting with games for learning, I now suggest experimenting with technology. And while it is true that not everyone has the same access to technology, it is equally true that today, technology is within reach of many people.

7. And fourthly, leeway to gather momentum. Or, in the more beautiful words of Benedetti: “to dream with our eyes wide open until the inevitable day arrives.” Indeed, as you can see, it is in uncertain times that questions accumulate. And it should also be when we strive most to advance (some) answers. Evaluation provides answers, as you know. And participatory evaluation, in addition to answers, brings complicity, commitment, and perspective. If public administrations repeatedly say “we will stop this virus together,” I hope no one will forget in a few months that reviewing and correcting mistakes to prevent this situation from recurring in the future should be, more than ever, everyone’s responsibility.

A supportive hug and take care.

## 5. ESTEBAN TAPELLA

Hello everyone, how are you? I hope you are all well. This is a very good debate. Thank you for the opportunity. Some of these questions had already started to be discussed with friends and colleagues a month ago, perhaps motivated by the same concerns that have now brought this topic to the forum.

I have been thinking about it, but I do not find a clear answer. I feel as much uncertainty as the pandemic generates in every corner of the world, now with increased intensity in Latin America. The situation changes so rapidly, and there are so many pressures to try to

keep up in a world that is turned upside down, that I cannot think of a solution to imagine. My father used to say that a pessimist is an optimist who is well-informed. I do not know if that is true, but that is where my reflection leads. Apologies for my pessimism!

In Argentina, the situation is becoming quite dire, and what seemed to be limited to the large cities is now starting to spread to the provinces, some of which have already collapsed in their capacity to respond. Face-to-face classes in primary, secondary, and university education have been ruled out for 2020. Internet access for teachers and students is so limited that at least 50 per cent do not have connectivity. Even worse, the informal economy in my country, including informal employees and self-employed individuals, represents 50 per cent (Indec, February 2020). This vast sector of informal employment has been seriously affected with reduced incomes, and in many cases, their lost altogether. Even professionals dedicated to evaluation have lost concrete opportunities to carry out their work and are forced to seek other sources of income, which are very scarce.

The situation is so changing that I cannot imagine possible activities for participatory evaluation in this context. I feel that there are moments, like this one, when it might be better to look inward within institutions and put the practice of evaluation on 'standby'. I am aware that there are institutional mandates, as noted by those who contributed to the forum, work plans, agreed budgets, and so on, but this scenario conditions us from multiple angles. In this context, I cannot envision a participatory evaluation, much less those that assess social programmes reaching the most vulnerable sectors. Juan proposes some alternatives that allow us to address or replace the issue of 'physical presence' in evaluation (which is currently not possible due to the quarantine). These technologies, which we have used at times, sound very promising, and their suggestions are valuable. However, beyond capturing the 'feelings of the people' regarding an intervention with these tools, what concerns me is the relevance (in this context) of questioning the results, effects, processes, and impacts of interventions already carried out when the vital needs in many cases are different. In other words, programmes that were 'evaluatable' six or seven months ago are no longer so, given the context we are in.

I feel that people's concerns, especially of the most vulnerable populations to whom social policies and development programmes are directed, have shifted to other issues today. Even if they generously agreed to answer a survey or participate in a WhatsApp group, I wonder: Will these responses be relevant for evaluating an intervention? Or will these responses be 'coloured' by this unprecedented context, not even imagined in the worst scenarios of the intervention? It is possible that these responses might unintentionally 'penalise' the achievements of the intervention, as in such a hostile context, everything becomes 'camouflaged' and it is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.

At the Participatory Evaluation (PE) meeting we held in Quito last November, we 'played' with defining PE in one word. Someone suggested one that I loved: EMPATHY. To me, empathy is the intention to understand feelings and emotions, trying to objectively and rationally experience what another individual feels. Empathy encourages people to help each other. It is closely related to altruism and the ability to assist. I believe that if we have the ability to put ourselves in someone else's place, we will better understand how relevant, timely, and possible it is today to carry out evaluations. And I refer not only to the situation of those who were users of the programme/project but also to those responsible for carrying out the evaluations. I believe that today, more than ever, donor organisations, public institutions, and their 'mandates' should be infused with empathy. Perhaps now is the time for other questions and concerns for people, rather than evaluating our interventions...

Thank you for the debate!

Hugs, Esteban Tapella

## 6. ANA JIMENEZ

Thank you for your contributions! I stand with Esteban on the lack of answers and the need, now more than ever, of empathy.

In our organisation, we have essentially paralysed the ongoing evaluation projects from before COVID but we did take the opportunity to carry out minor evaluations or assessments of our COVID interventions with the participants or beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. As well as study of the impact of COVID on children and teenagers.

Additionally, in our planning process in preparation for the coming years we have widened the scope of analysis to the current context while gathering present needs and assessments on how relevant our work would be if carried out as we have been doing so far and what tweaks we should make.

Thus, rather than continue our scheduled evaluative processes, we have had to open new ones with different objectives but always with the same spirit of participation and improvement. We really believe it is important to remain close and to not allow evaluation culture to wither away.

Regards! Take good care of your health and your spirit!

Ana Isabel Jiménez Dato

## 7. OLGA NIRENBERG

Hello!

I'll attempt to answer Pablo's question from 10 September about how to rethink strategies to manage evaluation activities in general and specifically participatory evaluation in the context of COVID-19. With my response, rather than providing clarity, I might contribute to increasing the general uncertainty and confusion.

Before delving into the topic, I will share that shortly after starting this prolonged isolation, at the end of March or early April, I experienced high fever, congestion, and severe sore throat. The emergency doctor from my social security insurance came to see me and diagnosed me with angina. I expressed my relief that it was not COVID-19, and I remember the bitter comment from the doctor who said: "There are many cases of angina at the moment, it is almost an epidemic, but right now there are no other diseases for medicine... only COVID-19." Indeed, we soon realised that preventive checks were almost entirely suspended, and worse still, attention to other health problems; to mention just a few: cardiovascular issues, cancer, mental health problems; even child vaccinations in Argentina decreased by between 35 and 40 per cent during these months. The morbidity and mortality figures from these other causes will confirm this very soon when Argentina's health statistics, which are significantly delayed, are updated. Those of us who evaluate interventions in the health field should reflect on these deleterious effects. The memory of that doctor's comment keeps coming back to me as it was anticipatory and metaphorical of the losses later evidenced in many other areas of our lives.

Just as it happens to Esteban, at times I find it inevitable to be pessimistic and make references to our country, Argentina, where during this tragic 2020, in-person classes across the educational system, medical consultations, and many other social, cultural, and productive activities came to a halt or were significantly affected, resulting in a noticeable increase in unemployment, poverty, and indigence. The public policies implemented are insufficient, failing to compensate for the damage, while job opportunities decrease and obstacles to investment increase, deepening business and professional closures and emigration. But none of this seems to matter, only COVID-19.

In such a context, it should not come as a surprise the drastic reduction in evaluation activities, especially those with participatory methodologies and more specifically those related to social programmes working with the most vulnerable sectors. Undoubtedly, the evaluation profession is among those severely affected. I agree

with Esteban that the evaluability of social policies and programmes, which was already low, has decreased even further, and if that had not happened, thinking counterfactually and/or dystopically, the evaluative findings on the effects of interventions in poverty contexts would be very distressing.

Over the last decade, there had been significant progress in the relevance and legitimacy of evaluation, but here I also agree with Esteban that the pandemic context has rolled back several steps for evaluation as a priority activity.

I will focus a little on the educational issue, which is undoubtedly a priority and which I consider to be in serious emergency (as is the health issue). The region most affected by the pandemic on the planet at the moment is Latin America; countries that have resumed in-person education in the region are the exception (commendable is the case of Uruguay); whereas in Germany, Spain, the United States, South Korea, Israel, among others, they have returned to some degree of in-person learning, with advances and setbacks in some cases.

As early as April, UNICEF stated that interrupting school attendance could have serious repercussions on children's learning capacity, particularly for the poorest: the longer these vulnerable children stay out of school, the less likely they are to return; these children are already almost five times more likely to miss primary school than children from wealthier families. If before the pandemic one in two teenagers in Argentina did not finish secondary school, it is not difficult to imagine what will happen in the near future.

I believe that education will not return to how it was, especially from 2nd and 3rd cycles of primary education, in secondary and higher education; rather, for quite some time, if not forever, a proper balance of in-person and online modalities will need to be considered. Would this be something to celebrate? I think in some ways it is, that is, I am cautiously optimistic about this pedagogical change I foresee in the region. I cross my fingers that it can also be achieved in Argentina, where dominant teaching unions are advocating for not returning to in-person classes until a vaccine is widely administered; but they refrain from proposing adjustments to content and virtual pedagogical modalities during the pandemic. For more than ten years, I have been working in educational evaluation and have confirmed that teaching unions are the most reactionary, opposing not only evaluation but any innovative pedagogical change. I should point out that I distinguish between union leaders and the teachers themselves: there is a significant difference. From what I have observed, there has been no prioritisation or adaptation of curricular content to be effectively

delivered virtually; generally, there has been a direct transfer of the content that was previously taught in the classroom to remote class formats.

Going back to my optimism about incorporating virtuality into education, I must confess, however, that seeing my two grandchildren study their first year of university entirely online saddens me considerably, as they are missing out on what I remember (as a student and a teacher) of that rich social environment, camaraderie, creative discussion, and face-to-face study or work with students and teachers; I am grateful that neither is pursuing traditional careers in natural, physical, chemical, biological, or medical sciences, as they would not be able to do their laboratory practices today.

Another shortcoming that Argentinians have long struggled with and that I have always pointed out in my evaluations concerns teachers' capabilities and skills in the pedagogical use of information and communication technologies (ICT), as much of the teaching staff (especially in primary and secondary schools) lacks this habit, which has become more evident now. Prior to the pandemic, there were few policies or programmes addressing the strengthening of teachers in the pedagogical use of ICT; and there is also resistance from unions in this regard. I hope this improves from now on. To make matters worse, access to a smartphone, tablet, or laptop is much more difficult today than until the end of last year.

I want to emphasise: no ICT can completely replace in-person learning, so while I believe that incorporating virtuality is something to celebrate, it should be balanced with a well-organised proportion of in-person presence. I anticipate that this is also valid for participatory evaluation. Are educational authorities considering these issues? I hope so. Those of us working in educational evaluation should also consider this.

My imagination, although utopian, is aware that substantial investment and effort need to be devoted for a broad development of ICT infrastructure so that internet connectivity and computer equipment can reach all corners of our countries, to ensure these services are effectively universalised, as today this adds another significant source of inequality.

I do not dare to be too optimistic about participatory evaluation, not only due to the requirements for physical distancing and restrictive measures on meetings of more than a certain number of people but especially because of the reasons Esteban outlines regarding the concerns of people in vulnerable sectors in this pandemic situation and the halt in "non-essential" work activities.

I remember that during the HIV/AIDS era, those of us who implemented or evaluated programmes aimed at adolescents and young people, regardless of the field of their comprehensive development, always included content related to sexual and reproductive health, particularly prevention, detection, and care of sexually transmitted diseases. We should be doing the same now concerning the general population and COVID-19.

Paraphrasing Esteban once more, when he says that it is now time for other questions and other concerns for people, I agree that perhaps it is not the time to evaluate our interventions as we have been doing. I am not a practising religious person, but I am familiar with some biblical teachings, and I recall part of Ecclesiastes, which states that everything has its time and suggests the wisdom of differentiating when it is the right time for each thing: a time to sow and a time to harvest, a time to destroy and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to try and a time to desist... I agree that now is the time to think, review, and adapt methods and approaches, rather than a time for evaluation.

Finally, anticipating that we will have to coexist with COVID-19 for quite some time, I propose that the evaluation profession focus on the following issues:

- Until it is possible to travel to the locations where interventions are being carried out, let us try to identify and put together teams of local professionals and develop effective methods for their remote training, so as to prevent the interruption of actions. This would also help to build “installed capacities” in evaluation.
- Let us incorporate content related to COVID-19 prevention and care in our evaluations of the programmes we assess, so that these programmes also include such content.
- Emphasise the poor living conditions and risk factors that have become more evident due to COVID-19 in vulnerable sectors, such as inadequate housing, lack of drinking water, hygiene and sewage issues, overcrowding, and insufficient access to health and food services.
- Assess and highlight the “collateral” damage of COVID-19 on other health problems that have been neglected, as well as in education, work, and living conditions of populations, especially in vulnerable sectors, to recommend reparative policies or actions.
- Develop, discuss, and agree on protocols for conducting in-person meetings with significant local actors related to interventions.

- Create applications for virtual evaluation, after diagnosing the feasibility of these modalities in specific interventions and/or populations.
- Let us review our methodologies and tools to ensure that interventions and evaluations are not interrupted indefinitely.
- Systematise and disseminate our ways of working, their results, and the emerging recommendations.

Best regards,

Olga Nirenberg, Buenos Aires, 19 September 2020

## 8. ROMAROO

Good morning, and thank you for opening this forum.

Both the main text and the comments are very accurate, as the practice of participatory evaluation has indeed become more complicated. However, we are here to share our opinions.

The COVID-19 pandemic (coronavirus) represented a threat to educational progress worldwide. Without a concerted effort, it would have led to learning losses, increased school dropout rates, and greater inequality.

Countries reacted swiftly to ensure that learning did not come to a halt. We had to face the situation, manage continuity, and improve activities. This is how we must approach the pandemic in terms of participatory evaluation, bearing in mind that we cannot continue without this practice, as it is vital for our mental growth.

The technology of this era is so advanced that we can conduct an online forum without any problems. There are various platforms available, such as video conferencing applications and well-known apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.

These are some of the alternatives available to us for now.

Remember that limits are only mental; we ourselves set the barriers and we can remove them just as easily to expand our knowledge.

Thank you once again and have a great start to the week.

## 9. FERNANDA ARRIAZA

Hello everyone, and thank you for opening up this debate and reflection. Frankly, since the pandemic began, my time has been so focused on finding strategies to support families in mitigating the effects of COVID and highlighting its impact on settlements, that the time dedicated to reflecting on this topic has been, without a doubt, scarce or non-existent. However, I would like to share some of my reflections based on the experience of these strange past few months:

From the experience of TECHO supporting popular settlements in the region, the answer to the first question is quite simply, "nothing". The reason is that the needs of the territories where we work have reverted to basic survival activities (such as seeking food, cleaning supplies, medicine, water), and time for workshops and interviews has been sidelined. However, although evaluation processes are not strictly being carried out, residents and community leaders in these areas have not stopped forming teams to guide mitigation actions in their communities. They have conducted more actor mappings and developed initiatives with them than in the past, organised censuses, and distributed information to prevent COVID and support each other. Without romanticising community practice or downplaying the complex situation faced by those living in vulnerable conditions, what is happening today in terms of social cohesion and strengthening is significant and could provide fertile ground for resuming pending or upcoming participatory evaluation processes with renewed vigour. Although these are uncertain times, something that is clear to most of us is that post-pandemic life will not be the same as it was before. From that "before," something we should preserve in its most authentic form is human contact and placing people at the centre of processes.

Today, the leaders we work with are demanding the creation of effective and binding dialogues, the formalisation of public-territorial participation spaces, and recognition as active agents in governmental decisions about the transformation of their territories. We know that for this to happen, we must invest time and resources in their training and seek political advocacy spaces. However, the knowledge and ownership they have of their territories will be much stronger if they have information resulting from reflection and learning processes, enabling them to make evidence-based decisions and create environments of trust and communication with their neighbours, thus gaining the support and validation of their communities.

Perhaps there is very little or nothing we can do right now to keep evaluation processes afloat. It will be their human and person-centred nature that will make

participatory evaluation a sought-after resource. A few weeks ago, we organised a virtual volunteering meeting with young people from the 18 countries where we are working. In a space where we invited female community leaders to share their experiences in this context, we asked them what they expected from us upon returning to the field, and the response was patience. Hopefully, the impact of the pandemic on evaluation will be to help us transition towards more flexible and adaptive processes, deepening our understanding of reality and recognising our interdependence.

Once again, thank you very much for the space.

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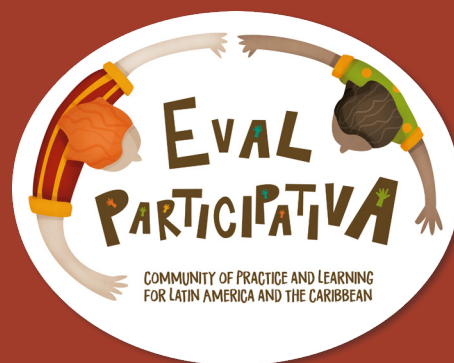
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This community was born in response to increased interest and practice of evaluation both regionally and worldwide. The last few decades have seen increased contributions to evaluation theory and methodology. There has also been a surge in national evaluation policies in countries in every continent, intensified efforts to integrate evaluation in institutions and the consolidation of diverse initiatives aimed at professionalising this practice. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals set out a new global agenda of priorities for evaluation which includes making civil society the protagonist in evaluation and emphasises that participation should be central in evaluation practice. Concepts such as “participation”, “support”, “stakeholder perspective” and other similar phrases have therefore become frequently heard in evaluative endeavours.

EvalParticipativa seeks to encourage the inclusive involvement of civil society in evaluative processes. To this end, three main objectives have been defined: a) to strengthen and consolidate the community of practice and learning of participatory evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean; b) to facilitate the reproduction and institutionalisation of this evaluation approach by developing written and audiovisual material about the experiences and lessons learned in relation to participatory evaluation; and c) to promote training on participatory evaluation through courses for facilitators, in-person and virtual forums and seminars with representatives from organisations of the civil society from the region, public and private sectors and academia, as well as instances of academic certification on participatory evaluation.

The community has over three thousand followers on different virtual platforms. In addition, there are actions coordinated with the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC), the organisation TECHO, the Foundation for Overcoming Poverty and the Servicio País programme (Chile), and the Local Development Support Centre (CEADEL) from Argentina.

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