

INTRODUCTION

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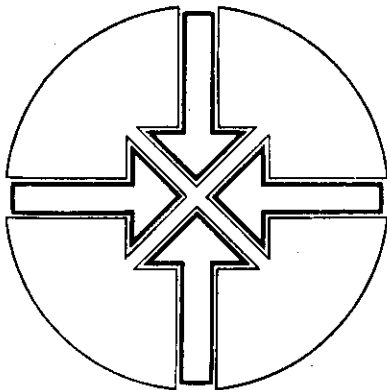
The growth of human civilization has implied human reflection throughout its history. As human beings, individually and collectively, confronted nature for their basic survival in the early days, they also began to reflect on their experience in order to improve ways and means of finding food for survival. This process of reflection is what has now come to be known as 'evaluation'. Thus, evaluation is an integral process of human development and existence. All of us engage in evaluation of our day's work, of the different stages in our life, of our accomplishments, of our failures, as well as, an evaluation of others and their accomplishments. Thus the process of evaluation is integral to human thinking, reflection and daily existence.

With the rise of specialization in different areas of work and disciplines, evaluation has also become a specialized activity. This has become particularly so in the context of development theory and practice. Over the last two decades, development programmes involved in agriculture, rural development, health, education, forestry, drinking water, etc. have been evaluated with great vigour and rigour. Evaluation has also been incorporated as an integral part of the planning and implementation of each development programme. Thus the practice and usage of evaluation has become widespread in all development initiatives throughout the world.

By and large, most development programmes now provide for time and resources for evaluation and invite those specialized in conducting such evaluations to do so. As a consequence of this practice of evaluation, certain distortions in the process have emerged over the years. First of all, evaluation became a specialized, separate activity away from the ongoing planning and implementation of a development initiative. It became such a specialization that specialized people and institutions began to be involved in it; and programme planners and implementers and those benefiting from it felt alienated from this process of evaluation.

Secondly, misplaced emphasis on separation of programme implementation and evaluation got supported under the belief of objectivity. It was felt that those implementing a development programme may not have the necessary motivation to assess their efforts dispassionately and objectively. Thus external people and institutions, mostly outsiders to the given development programme, began to play the central role in evaluation.

A third distortion emerged as a consequence of resource-providers, be they national or international donors, demanding that evaluation of the programmes they support be carried out periodically. Thus evaluation became the link to the possibilities of future resources and, therefore, something to be cautious of and to protect oneself from. As a consequence of evaluation exercises becoming the links to the question of continuation of grants and resources, it became an exercise in "hiding the mistakes"



and "putting the best foot forward". Thus, when externally appointed evaluators visited programme sites, everybody praised the programme, kept critical information away from surfacing and remained generally in a state of terror during the period evaluation was being conducted.

Thus evaluation became a tool to control programmes, resources, programme planners and implementers in the field of development over these years. This alienation and distancing of the evaluation process, from being an integral part of human thinking and activity, provided the basis for posing questions and evolving an alternative theory and practice of evaluation. This is what has come to be known as Participatory Evaluation.

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Participatory Evaluation is the methodology of making evaluation an integral process of any planning, and implementing a development initiative which puts people involved in it in the centre and not remain on the periphery. This implies a collective process of reflection, critical assessment and review about the accomplishment (or lack of accomplishment) of programme goals. Therefore, having a standard, a goal or an objective as a yardstick becomes important in determining the value of a given activity.

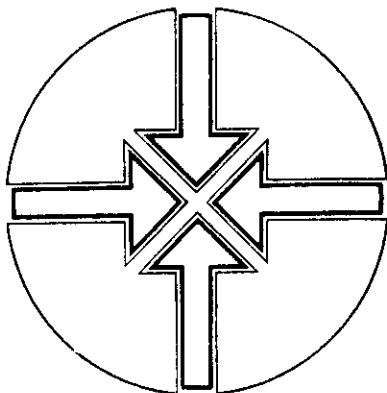
Historically, evaluation has implied assessing the accomplishment of the goals of a given programme, by measuring the impact of the activities and plans when the goals were set.

Clearly this kind of an evaluation can help us understand the extent to which the planned activities led to the accomplishment of the goals, the reasons for not meeting these goals, and the consequences of such activities other than accomplishment of the stated goals. The value of evaluation can be extended if it can be seen as an exercise in promoting the future development of the programme and the people involved in it, and not merely a historical analysis of the past. Thus, this link between the past and the future is one of the starting premises of Participatory Evaluation. By definition, Participatory Evaluation is intended to be developmental in nature, and not regulatory or controlling. It is intended to promote the growth and development of programmes, plans, perspectives and organizations in the future. Therefore, it is seen as an intervention within an overall framework of the past and the future.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

The central characteristic of Participatory Evaluation is that people involved in a given development programme or organization, both as implementers and as beneficiaries, start participating in, and take charge of the evaluation efforts.

The control over the process of evaluation remains in the hands of those who are developing and implementing and benefitting from the programmes. Thus, the evaluation serves the interest of furthering the benefits and improving the programmes and organizations involved in development at the base, and not those who are intending to control it from the top. In a way, Participatory Evaluation is an attempt at redefining and reaffirming development as a "bottom-up", "people-centered", "people-controlled" process and not a technocratic, top-down intervention. It is this thrust that provides the distinctive meaning to Participatory Evaluation methodology.



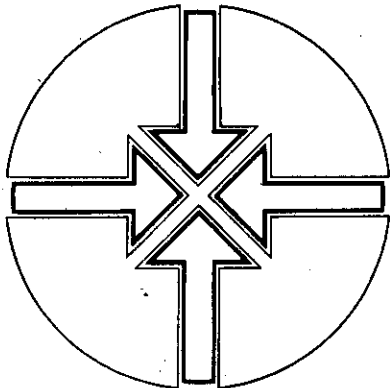
WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Before we answer the question what is Participatory Evaluation, it may be useful, first of all to become clear as to what is evaluation. The literal meaning of the word 'evaluation' is "to determine the value of". This essentially means to assess the worth of, the value of, a given activity. This implies at least two things: *first*, that a given activity is to be assessed in a given context – the process of assessment, of analysis, of review is critical in any evaluation; *second* is to assess the activity in relation to something and that something is the goal or the objective of the activity. All development programmes and plans evolve with a given set of objectives and goals. We evolve these goals and objectives on the basis of certain broader understanding and values. In order to achieve these goals, certain activities are planned. These plans are then intended to accomplish the above goals. Once the plans have been implemented, we can then assess whether these activities really led to the accomplishment of these goals or not. This is the process of evaluation. (See Chart I).

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Participatory Evaluation implies that it is developmental and is in the interests of those who are involved in planning and implementing the given developmental activities and benefitting from the same. Thus, the process of evaluation is to be controlled by those whose activities, initiatives, plans and outcomes are being evaluated. Another characteristic of Participatory Evaluation, given its above concern, is to ensure that it is a collective process of reflection, planning and control and that it is not a process whereby a single individual reflects on behalf of others and presents outcomes of his/her reflection for others to use in developing their plans. This collective nexus of Participatory Evaluation ensures a wider control as well as broader developmental possibilities.

Finally, Participatory Evaluation is to be seen as a process of individual and collective learning. In a sense, it is an educational experience. It is learning about one's strengths, about one's weaknesses; learning about the way plans and programmes get implemented; learning about social processes and development outcomes; learning about social reality and intervening in the same; learning about creation and development of organizations and ensuring their relevance and longevity. It implies clarifying and rearticulating one's vision and perspective about the development work we are involved in. This educational thrust of Participatory Evaluation methodology implies that various parties involved in a development programme experience Participatory Evaluation as a learning process for themselves. And, the process is designed and structured in such

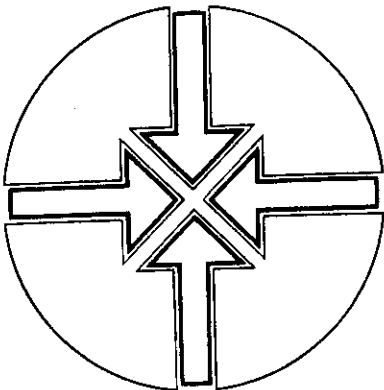


a way that it ensures that learning. It is not merely the outcome of Participatory Evaluation which provides insights and learning, it is also the very involvement in the process of Participatory Evaluation that becomes the basis for learning and education. Thus it creates conditions conducive to, and willingness for, change for action. This is a crucial distinction between Participatory Evaluation and conventional evaluation methodologies.

At the core of Participatory Evaluation methodology, therefore, is our faith in ordinary people, grass-roots workers, community organizers, adult educators etc., our belief that they are themselves interested in improving their practice, sharpening their vision and developing themselves; and that they would be interested in, and committed to, evaluating themselves, their activities and programmes in order to do so. It is this faith in ordinary people, in their willingness and capacity to get involved in a critical reflection exercise that provides the philosophical underpinning to Participatory Evaluation methodology. This is the basic difference between looking at Participatory Evaluation as a developmental experience, an educational experience as opposed to a regulatory mechanism, of control over people, programmes and resources.

The Participatory Evaluation methodology is rooted in a certain world-view, a certain vision about human beings and their capacity and, therefore, in a certain interpretation of social reality.

It is, therefore, important to recognize that Participatory Evaluation methodology is rooted in a certain world-view, a certain vision about human beings and their capacity and, therefore, in a certain interpretation of social reality. It is not a mere tool or technique which is distinct from other tools or techniques and can be mechanically applied and implemented in any context. Its historical and contextual underpinning lies in the process of making development, and related activities, controlled by the people at the base in their own collective interest, and it provides the basic meaning to Participatory Evaluation methodology. Without that context, it may be misappropriated and misinterpreted, as a mere set of tools and techniques.



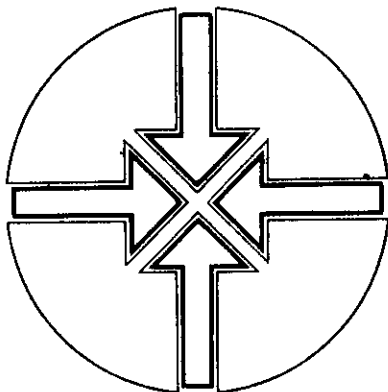
WHY PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

The Participatory Evaluation methodology is consistent with participatory models of development which are now being experimented with at the grass-roots level throughout the world.

Having clarified what is Participatory Evaluation methodology, it may be useful to spend some time understanding its relevance and importance in the context of development. It is our view that Participatory Evaluation methodology is consistent with participatory models of development which are now being experimented with at the grass-roots level throughout the world. In the new models of development, people are at the centre, and are involved in creating their own plans and programmes for their development, and such plans and programmes are implemented through their active involvement and overall control. Given this thrust of people-centered, bottom-up development, it makes consistent sense to ensure that the process of reflection and evaluation has similar characteristics and meaning. It will be a contradiction to have a people-centered, bottom-up process of development evaluated through commissioned agents appointed by resource-providers. It is in this context that the value of Participatory Evaluation becomes heightened.

In the context of such a development initiative specifically, Participatory Evaluation has been utilized with three broad emphases. (See Chart II). The *first* emphasis of Participatory Evaluation has been on the programmes and activities within a given development context. The assumptions behind developing a programme are tested through a Participatory Evaluation exercise after the programme has been implemented for a period of time. These programmes and activities could be an adult education effort, an income-generating programme, a rural development initiative or a health care programme. Development programmes are planned to accomplish some short-term goals, and evaluation of the activities at the programme level can help us to assess whether those goals have been accomplished and to what extent, and what came in the way of doing the same. Thus, Participatory Evaluation has been largely utilized in assessing the impact of a given programme, in assessing the underlying assumptions by which those programmes were created, in assessing the relevance of those programmes in the context of changing social realities, and in assessing the manner in which those programmes were implemented.

Thus, the focus of such an evaluation exercise is essentially on the "field" and it largely entails active involvement of local population, people who are likely to benefit and gain from the programmes and field-level staff and organizers. This is a very important emphasis in Participatory Evaluation because it helps us to improve our programmes in the future and to strengthen the possibilities of accomplishing those goals and objec-



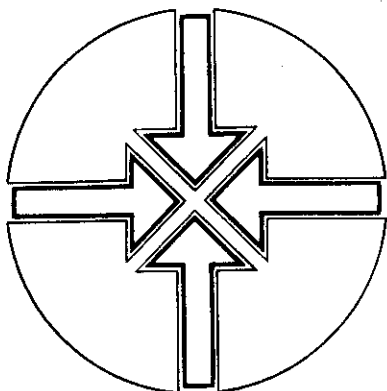
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tives in the future. Such an evaluation also helps us to define new programme thrusts, new programme activities, new ways of implementing programmes and activities, and extending the dimensions of existing programmes.

The *second* major emphasis in Participatory Evaluation has been on the development-promoting organization itself. In order to plan, implement and sustain development programmes and activities in a given area, we all create organizations as mechanisms for the same. Over a period of time, these organizations have to develop their own internal capacity to continue this process of development. As people join in these organizations, as systems, procedures and structures get created in these organizations, as the external environment begins to interact with these organizations, various organizational issues begin to emerge in the history of all development-promoting organizations. These issues relate to people-to-people interaction, interpersonal relations, issues of team-building, conflict between young and old, new members and old members, field staff vs head office staff, etc.

Organizational issues also include the tension between the need for routine structure and spontaneity and flexibility, between the need to create a minimum agreed common ground and the need to provide space for individual creativity, the need to ensure a common understanding of the organization's missions and goals and tasks, and the need to provide opportunity for members of the organization to continuously redefine those missions, goals and tasks. Over a period of time, all development-promoting organizations begin to interact with their social, political and regulatory environment. Various laws and rules governing them begin to affect them; donors and other resource-providers begin to influence them and the organizations need to evolve strategies to not only cope with these segments of the environments, but also to influence them more actively. Over a period of time, all development promoting organizations, as a consequence of their success, begin to expand and grow into new areas, new programmes, new activities and new staff. Growth brings new issues in its wake and organizations begin to face a series of issues arising out of this growth process. These and many more such organizational issues become a necessary focus of attention in the context of development.

A Participatory Evaluation exercise, with its emphasis on the organization, can help us reflect on these issues, and others, and to evolve strategies to deal with them in an open, critical and collective fashion. A Participatory Evaluation intervention around such issues can help bring about a common and shared understanding of the problems and collective efforts to solve them. Such a Participatory Evaluation intervention can help in developing the organization and ensuring its smooth, strong and dynamic future. Such a Participatory Evaluation intervention with emphasis on organizational issues, has a process that is "institution-focused" and entails the active involvement of the field staff, senior members of the organization including its governing body members and other key parties in its environment. The need to utilize Participatory Evaluation intervention around such organizational issues is only beginning to be



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recognized among the development community in recent years. Our experience has suggested that this is an extremely crucial area where a Participatory Evaluation exercise can be of immense value in ensuring strength, dynamism and vitality of a development promoting organization.

The *third* area where Participatory Evaluation has put emphasis is on the perspective with which a development initiative is undertaken. Development is a socio-political issue and it entails a certain vision and commitment. We all have a vision about what society ought to be and a commitment for changing the given existing system towards that vision. Our perspective helps us determine how this change process will occur and what could be our role in supporting and strengthening such a change process. All development programmes are created as a consequence of this perspective. Our perspectives are based on certain assumptions which can be refined through Participatory Evaluation. A Participatory Evaluation exercise can help us redefine our perspective in the context of changing social reality.

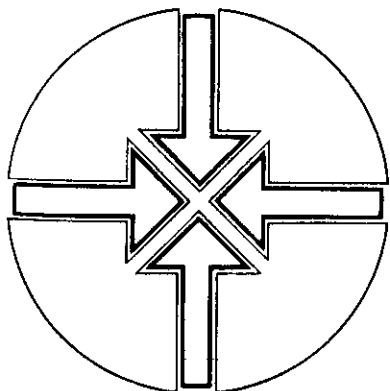
Many times the social reality around us changes so rapidly that we need to re-examine our perspective and redefine our role in the context of the new reality. A Participatory Evaluation exercise can also help us to reaffirm our vision, our faith and our commitment. It can help us to sharpen our understanding of the social reality and possibilities of our intervention in the same. A reflection process catalyzed through Participatory Evaluation with emphasis on perspective may entail a rejuvenation of our commitment, our vision, our direction, our understanding, our ideology, and the potential possibilities of our role in the future. Many a times development-promoting individuals and organizations experience a certain sense of stagnation, a plateau in their work and become confused about which way to go, what are the future steps and directions in their own role. It is in these moments we have found that a Participatory Evaluation intervention has been extremely useful in not only reclarifying but also reaffirming the vision, commitment and perspective.

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Thus, a Participatory Evaluation intervention in a development context can be utilized to reflect on the programme, or the organization or the perspective. In reality, all these three are intertwined. And, many a times, Participatory Evaluation exercise helps identify congruence, or otherwise, between perspective, programme and organization. This can become a major outcome of such an exercise. We have found that the primary emphasis in context to above three areas of a given Participatory Evaluation intervention determines the scope, the nature, the timing and the methods utilized, as can be seen from Chart II.

In the case-studies presented, three (Village Development Trust, Charity Bengal and Andhra Pradesh Balwadi Programme) are based on the



primary emphasis on *programmes*; the other three (Inter School Project, Jagriti and Rural Development Organization) have a primary emphasis on their own *organization*; and the last two (Workers' Education Project and Tribal Development Society) have a primary emphasis on the *perspective*. As the case-studies themselves show, other aspects also get involved in it, though the primary emphasis continues to determine the scope and the depth of the evaluation.

Participatory Evaluation is

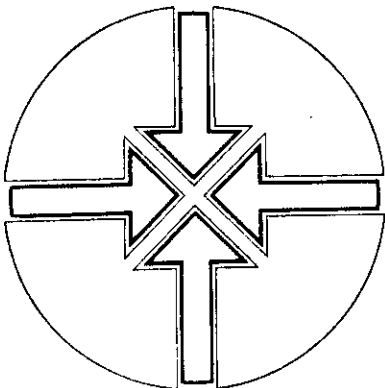
based on our faith that people are interested in improving their practice and sharpening their vision;

developmental in nature; and in the interest of those who are actual actors of the activities to be evaluated;

a process controlled by those whose activities, initiatives, plans and outcomes are evaluated;

a collective process of reflection and planning;

an educational experience for those involved in it.



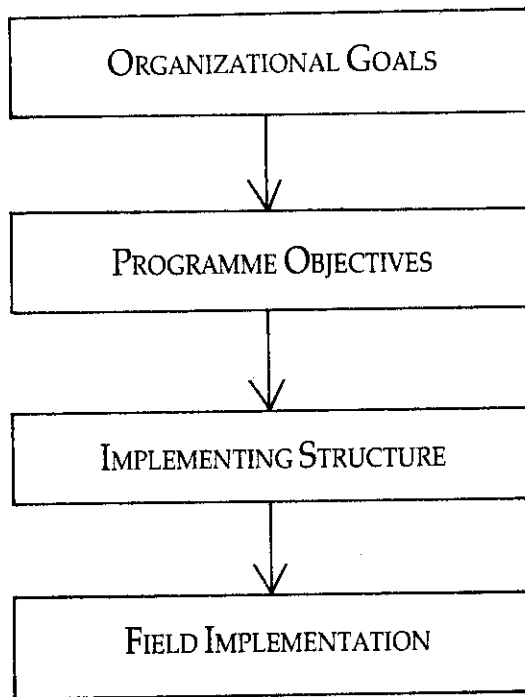


CHART I

Primary Emphasis	Programme	Organization	Perspective
Process	Field focus	Institution focus	Vision focus
Participants	Local people Field staff	Field staff Senior members of the organization Governing body members	Senior members of the organization
Methods	Questionnaires, interviews, records	Perceptual data, interviews, group meetings	Discussions, meetings, etc.
	VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT TRUST CHARITY BENGAL ANDHRA PRADESH BALWADI PROGRAMME	RURAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION JAGRITI INTER SCHOOL PROJECT	TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY WORKERS' EDUCATION PROJECT

CHART II