

4 PR/CONCEPT  
11/2002

LEARNING MATERIAL

M. 92007  
M. 11020

PR-107

✓  
✓

# Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

**Participatory Evaluation  
Issues and Concerns**  
*Resource: PRIA Manual*

By  
**Anil Choudhary and Rajesh Tandon**

**August 20 - 25, 2001**

**ORGANISED BY  
PRIA**

LEARNING MATERIAL

---

# INTRODUCTION

The process of evaluation is integral to human thinking, reflection and daily existence.

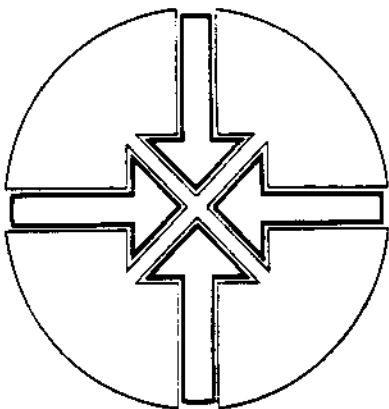
The growth of human civilization has implied human reflection throughout its history. As human beings, individually and collectively, confronted nature for their basic survival in the early days, they also began to reflect on their experience in order to improve ways and means of finding food for survival. 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.

**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.**

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.

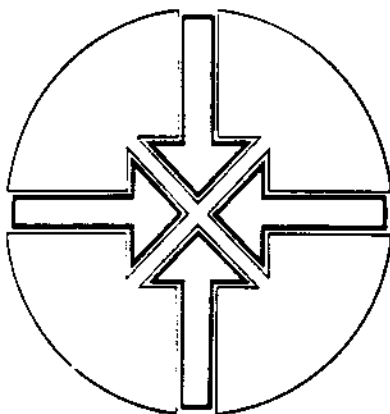
Historically, evaluation has implied assessing the accomplishment of the goals of a given programme, by measuring the impact of the activities and plans when the goals were set.

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.



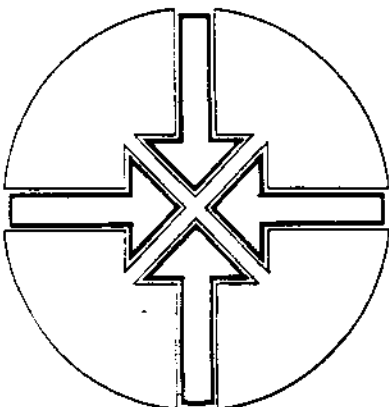
# WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

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).

Participatory Evaluation is to be seen as a process of individual and collective learning. In a sense, it is an educational experience.

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 benefiting 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

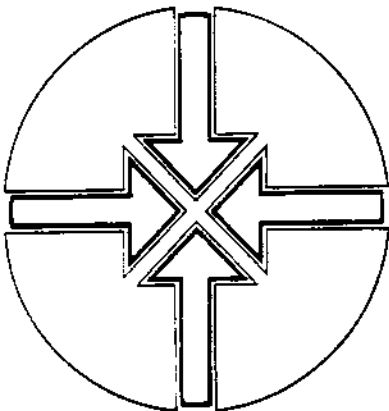


a way that it ensures that learning. It is not merely the outcome of Participatory Evaluation which provides insights and learning, it is also the very involvement in the process of Participatory Evaluation that becomes the basis for learning and education. Thus it creates conditions conducive to, and 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.



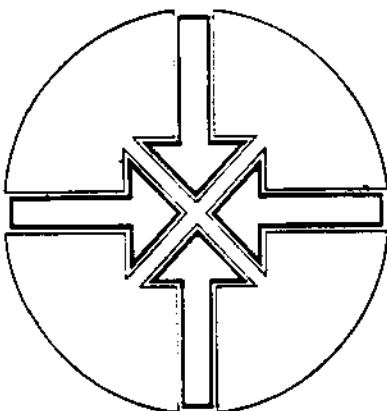
# WHY PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

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-



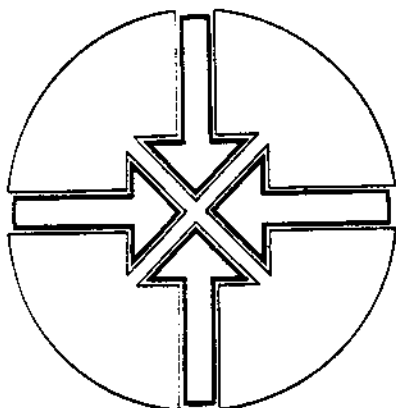
The focus of an evaluation exercise is essentially on the "field" and it largely entails active involvement of local population, people who are likely to benefit and gain from the programmes and field-level staff and organizers.

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.

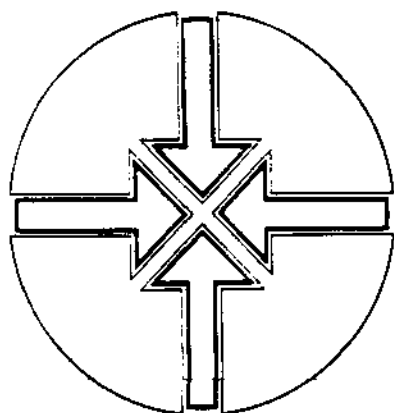
Organizational issues also include the tension between the need for routine structure and spontaneity and flexibility, between the need to create a minimum agreed common ground and the need to provide space for individual creativity, the need to ensure a common understanding of the organization's missions 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



A Participatory Evaluation intervention with emphasis on organizational issues, has a process that is "institution-focussed" 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.

A Participatory Evaluation intervention emphasizing a reflection of the perspective is "vision-focussed" and it necessarily entails active involvement of senior members of the organization and all those who are involved in it, as the vision and commitment of all development-promoting individuals becomes the focus of the intervention.



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.

Thus, a Participatory Evaluation intervention emphasizing a reflection of the perspective is "vision-focussed" and it necessarily entails active involvement of senior members of the organization and all those who are involved in it, as the vision and commitment of all development-promoting individuals becomes the focus of the intervention.

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**

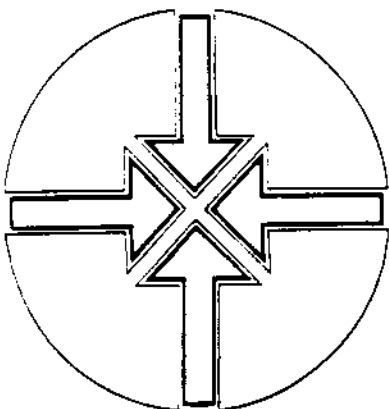
**based on our faith that people are interested in improving their practice and sharpening their vision;**

**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.**



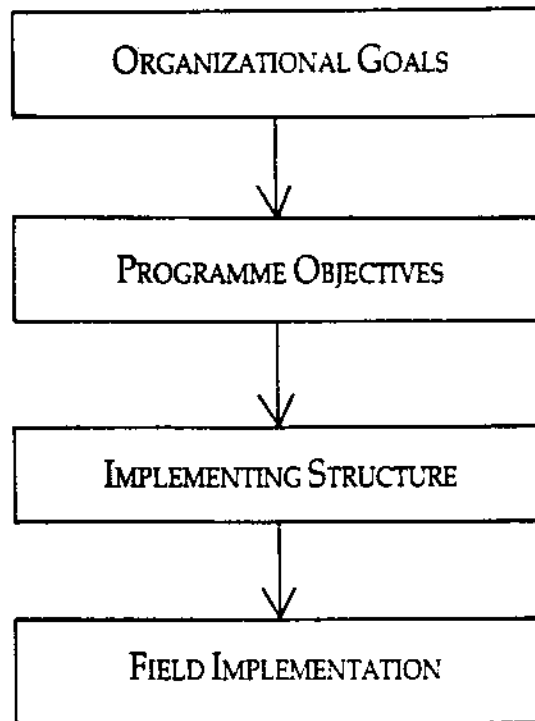


CHART I

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

---

# HOW IS A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION EXERCISE PLANNED AND CONDUCTED?

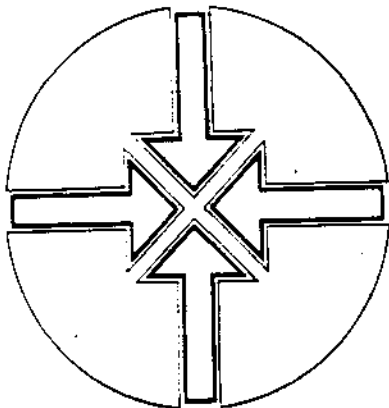
Much of this becomes clearer in the context of the case-studies presented in the next section. We believe that there is no readymade formula which can be applied in all situations. What we can suggest are a series of steps that we have used in our own context. Some of the key steps in the process are outlined in this section.

## 1. SETTING OBJECTIVES: FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The first task in any Participatory Evaluation exercise is to set objectives of the evaluation. We have traditionally utilized an initial workshop, with all key actors in the development situation, to set the objectives of the evaluation. We find that this is the most crucial step where discussions on why we need evaluation at this stage, to whom it is going to benefit, what problems it is going to cause to our work and what should be the key objectives of such an evaluation exercise are discussed at length and sorted out. At the end of this step the focus of evaluation gets determined and articulated. It is here that the distinction between the emphasis on programme, organization or perspective begins to get stated. This helps us set the frame of reference within which a given evaluation exercise then proceeds.

## 2. IDENTIFYING PARAMETERS AND INFORMATION NEEDED

Having agreed upon the objectives of evaluation, the next step is to identify what kind of information is needed on what parameters. For example, if the purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the health programme, then the infant mortality rate could be one of the parameters on which we need to get information. This is an exercise that requires



---

some reflection on what is it that we are trying to assess. It is the statement of those dimensions, those factors, those aspects, those variables, which we are trying to assess that this step entails and it may involve a certain degree of reflection and thinking before these parameters get articulated.

### 3. IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

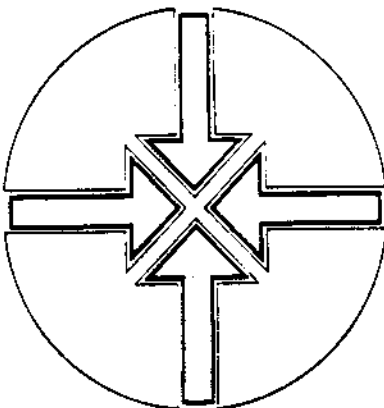
Once we know what information we want, then we can identify where we are going to get it from. The source of information could be members in the community, field staff, senior members of the organization, parties in the environment (like government officials), records, reports, documents, actual field situation etc. Different types of information can be obtained from different sources. Where people's impressions, views, experiences, perceptions, ideas, feelings are important, people themselves become the major source of information. Besides, historical and archival records and documents can also provide valuable information.

### 4. DEVELOPING METHODS TO OBTAIN THAT INFORMATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Once we know what information we want and what is the source of that particular information, we can then develop methods to obtain that information. Methods of data-collection can be varied: we can have open-ended interviews, questionnaires, structured interviews, group discussions, field observations, study of records, physical measurements, etc. In addition to the use of all these methods which have also been used in traditional evaluation practices, newer methods of data-collection can also be evolved. Folk media, songs, role-plays, dramas, art, drawings, etc., have also been extensively used in getting information through popular means. Essentially this step entails developing appropriate methods for collection of information and then collecting that information.

### 5. ANALYSING DATA

Once information has been collected from different sources in different ways then it has to be put together, consolidated, categorized and analysed. Some common patterns, some variations, some links, some relations, some measures have to be developed through this process of analysis. It is important that at this stage of analysis a collective process is supported and encouraged, so that analysis becomes a shared one, as opposed to an individual one. The point needs to be emphasized here that the collective analysis thus reached should be disseminated to all those constituencies from where this information has been taken. This "feedback" is an important step in the process.



## 6. CREATING FUTURE SCENARIOS

Inevitably, we have found that analysis of the past is very closely linked to creating future scenarios. In our practice of Participatory Evaluation, we have deliberately utilized this step to assist parties involved in the evaluation process to paint desirable future scenarios on the basis of the analysis so developed. Sometimes this step also entails assessing the outside environment in order to paint such future scenarios for their work, for their programmes, for their local situations, etc.

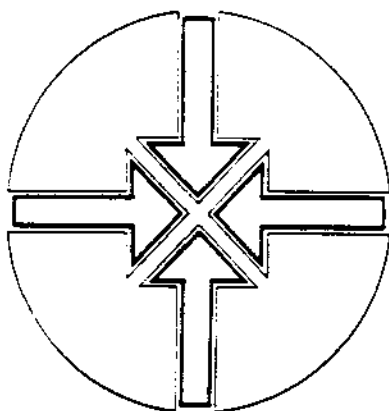
## 7. EVOLVING ACTION PLANS

Multiple future scenarios are then discussed, sorted out and integrated and the parties are encouraged to develop concrete action plans arising out of the analysis and the agreed upon future scenarios. These action plans, at least in the context of Participatory Evaluation, are broadly identified, and not concretely planned in detail. That could be a step following the evaluation exercise.

### SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES

The crucial step cutting through all the previous steps of the planning process is to ensure that responsibility for these various tasks in the evaluation process is shared between different parties – local people, field staff, other members of the organization, facilitators of the evaluation, etc. This is important to ensure authenticity in data-collection and rigour in analysis, as well as in sustaining the ownership of different parties to the evaluation process. A time-plan is also developed at the same time.

We now invite you to study the case-studies in the next section. These illustrations will help clarify some practical questions in Participatory Evaluation, they will also provoke some issues for reflection. The last section addresses some of those issues.



---

# ISSUES IN PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Having looked at various examples in the preceding section, it is now possible for us to highlight some of the key issues that have emerged in the course of our practice and an elaboration of the methodology of Participatory Evaluation. These issues are by no means exhaustive but indicate the kinds of concerns that have regularly confronted us as well as our partner organizations in the course of planning and implementing Participatory Evaluation efforts. Here we describe the issues, the different nuances and aspects, and attempt to state our own position on it as clearly as we understand it today.

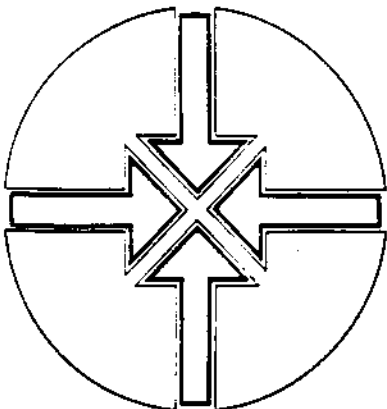
## **1. The first issue relates to the difference between methodology and method.**

Participatory Evaluation is a methodology of systematic and critical reflection and analysis of our work. It is a methodology that has a certain world-view and philosophy, and the world-view of participatory evaluation is to enhance the capacity of ordinary people, projects and groups to carry out a systematic and critical reflection and evaluation process of their own activities, programmes, organizations and perspectives on a regular and ongoing basis. It is this demystification of evaluation and strengthening the capacity at the grass-roots to appropriate, control and utilize evaluation that reflects the basic premises of the philosophy of Participatory Evaluation methodology. It is within this overall methodology that the choice of tools, technique and methods can be understood. Should a particular evaluation exercise require, these methods can be for data collection, for facilitating reflection, and for improving analyses. That is to say a whole range of tools, techniques and methods can be utilized in a specific situation in order to facilitate a concrete reflection and evaluation exercise.

## **2. "I thought you were qualitative"**

A very common comment that we hear is that Participatory Evaluation implies qualitative information and its analysis. Whenever we come up with the need to collect or analyse quantitative information in the course of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise, it is resisted, as if this is a violation of the norms of Participatory Evaluation.

The basic confusion mentioned in the previous issue is the source of such misunderstandings. The type of information that is necessary to carry out a systematic process of reflection and critical analysis depends



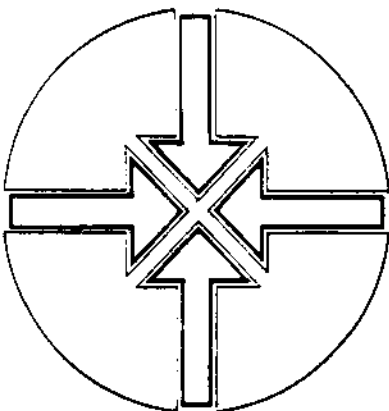
on a given Participatory Evaluation exercise and its specific objectives. That information can be statistical, cognitive, perceptual, qualitative, etc. Depending on the type of information we need, the type of data collection methods will have to be created. It is conceivable to collect (and we have used it as you can see from the case studies) qualitative as well as statistical and quantitative information in the course of an evaluation exercise. When we need such information, we have to create instruments and questionnaires that are able to elicit such information. We also need to look at records and documents which contain such information, both inside and outside the organization. Qualitative information is more easily obtained through open interviews, group discussions, field observations, etc.

Thus the choice of a particular set of methods for data collection, be they interviews or questionnaires or group discussions or instruments of observation, depends largely on the specific objectives of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. Those objectives decide what kind of information we need to collect; and the type of information we need to collect determines the kinds of information collection methods and tools we are going to use.

As the case studies seem to indicate, one can make some tentative generalizations about the patterns *viz.-a-viz.* the method of data collection for different types of Participatory Evaluation exercises. Clearly where the focus of the evaluation is on the programmes and their impact on the ground, a more detailed information about impact can be collected only through structured instruments and questionnaires, and collection of statistical information from records and documents. Thus, Participatory Evaluation exercises initially and largely focussing on programmes tend to be utilizing methods of information collection that are highly quantitative and structured.

On the other hand, those Participatory Evaluation exercises where the focus primarily is on clarifying, sharpening or modifying perspectives and directions of an organization, its teams, people's movement, etc., much more interactive and dialogue methods of information collection and analysis have to be utilized. Shifts in perceptions and understandings are necessary in order to bring about sharpened and modified perspectives within an organization and indepth interviews, informal, small group discussions, dialogues, and other interactive and open-ended methods of information collection and analysis become important in such an exercise. Obviously information about programmes and their impact helps in clarifying the perspective as well in certain situations, but depending on the specific situation, the methods of data collection utilized can vary considerably.

When it comes to the focus on the organization of a grass-roots project or an NGO or a people's movement as the primary focus of a Participatory Evaluation exercise, information of various types becomes necessary. It becomes necessary to understand the manner in which organizations function and therefore perceptual, attitudinal information may be as important as information available from documents and records and files. So, a combination of types of information may demand a combination of



types of data collection methods to be utilized in the course of a Participatory Evaluation exercise.

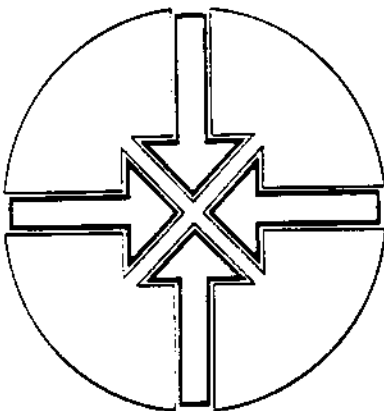
There is one other aspect in the issue of methods of data collection and that has to do with the potential of the method to catalyse reflective processes among the members of the organization itself. A set of methods which are traditionally not considered methods of information collection and analysis like role plays, case studies, drawings, audio-visuals, etc., may be necessary in order to catalyse reflection among the local people and field workers since those are the methods that can be easily utilized by them. For a largely illiterate or semi-literate population, use of paper and pencil instruments may be not so effective. So the choice of data collection methods, wherever flexibility permits, can be such that they facilitate greater involvement and participation, in the reflection and analysis process, of the members of the organizations and the group whose involvement is critical in the Participatory Evaluation exercise. Obviously this choice has to be made within the context of a specific Participatory Evaluation exercise based on the specific objectives of evaluation. No general prescriptions can be made here as well.

### 3. Who is participating in Participatory Evaluation?

Like in other areas, the word participation in the context of Participatory Evaluation is also a much confused, abused and misused word. The word "participation" sometimes provokes visions of mass involvement, bordering on anarchy. In our definition of Participatory Evaluation as stated previously, who participates depends on a specific situation and on the concrete objectives of the Participatory Evaluation exercise. If we take a grass-roots non-governmental organization's field programme and if we look at the focus of evaluation as programmatic, then clearly most crucial actors in the evaluation exercise would be field workers of the NGOs and the local people and beneficiaries. They would provide the initial analysis and information which can then become the basis for reflection by other members of the organization.

If, however, the focus of evaluation is clarifying the perspective of the NGO then the involvement of members of staff of the NGO is more important than involvement of local population. Changes in perspectives as well as in organizational form, structure and practices do require the involvement, commitment and support of key members of any organization and, therefore, an identification of such key members is necessary if this process of reflection, analysis and change has to be facilitated. Thus the participants in the examples of Participatory Evaluation given here vary considerably in their mixture, character, groupings, etc. Within a given Participatory Evaluation exercise, different parties can be involved at different stages as well as in different ways, and it is not necessary that every party who is a stake-holder in the Participatory Evaluation exercise gets involved in the same way.

The concept of stake-holders may be useful in understanding who gets involved in a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. The party whose interests are directly and primarily influenced by the focal objectives of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise must be involved. But it does not





mean that all the parties must be involved throughout in an identical fashion. This distinction needs to be understood and clarified.

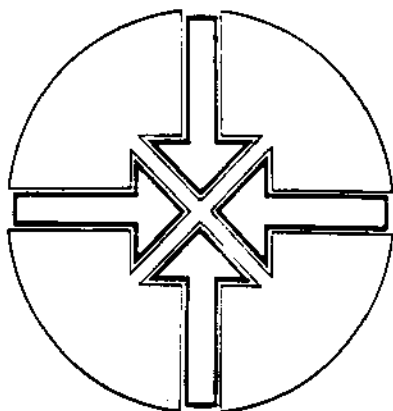
The issue about the nature of stake-holders and who participates also gets influenced by the extent and depth of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. It is possible that a particular localized programme of a large, well-established NGO with clear perspective and effective organization is the focus. In which case, field workers and staff involved in that programme and local population and groups benefiting from the same are the ones who require to play key roles in such an evaluation exercise. It is possible in such a case that other segments of the organization may not become actively involved. It is also conceivable that in a large non-governmental organization where the primary focus of evaluation is the organizational mechanism and organizational issues, the starting point could be the governing board, the executive head and his/her key team at the very top of the organization, and for quite sometime they may remain the key participants in the process, while other segments of the organization, field level workers and local populations may not be involved in the evaluation exercise directly.

The key question is how do we identify actors, parties, individuals, segments inside and outside the organization which have a varying contribution to the critical reflection and analysis process? It is this kind of focussed identification that should help us determine participants in a Participatory Evaluation exercise. Thus an omnibus, open-ended statement that everybody must participate since it is Participatory Evaluation makes no sense. Once again, a definition of Participatory Evaluation is not based on participation *per se*, but on its capacity to initiate, build and sustain a critical reflection process in a given organization, programme or movement.

#### 4. But what about the donors?

A common question in our experience has been the role of donors in a Participatory Evaluation exercise. As we have mentioned in the case studies many a times, a particular donor or a team of donors took the initiative in convening a process of Participatory Evaluation; sometimes this initiative comes jointly through the programme or NGO funded by them. Sometimes, it comes directly to a facilitating agency. The needs of resource providers in terms of evaluation have to be recognized as legitimate. This is true in all situations. The question is what kind of information do a set of resource providers need from a given context in order to help them make their own decisions. Thus the concerns and needs of donors must be explicitly taken into consideration and the place for this consideration to be articulated is in the initial stage of setting the objectives of evaluation. Inputs on resource providers and donors can be useful in fixing the objective of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise.

The other place where donors and resource providers can contribute is at a stage where the critical analysis and reflection process has progressed somewhat and broad findings are being articulated and future directions are being evolved. Because of a certain type of knowledge and understanding that resource providers have of a given project or a programme



or an organization, they can also help in this process of reflection as well as setting of future directions and programmes.

But there are several difficulties that arise in practice in the donor's role in a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. First of all, we have tried to de-link funding from the evaluation. We have tried to ask the donor and the project to discuss their funding needs separately. In many cases, the donors have assured continuity of funding and the evaluation exercise could help in determining what type and what form and for what purpose the funding may take place.

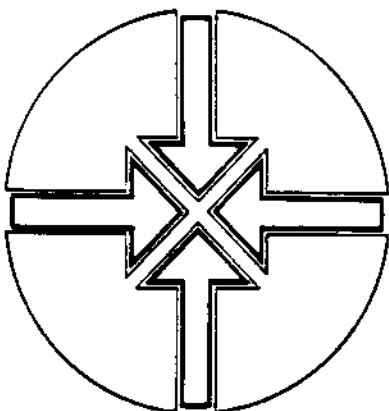
De-linking evaluation from funding ensures that the process will be genuine, authentic and critical. If a grass-roots organization or people's movement is worried about continuity of its funding as a consequence of its evaluation exercise, it will try to paint a rosy picture, will try to avoid critical reflections and may end up covering up key issues rather than confronting them.

In the case studies mentioned previously, there are examples where an organization on its own decided to initiate an evaluation process without any direct or indirect request from the donors. This of course is one of most healthy possibilities because this then keeps the issue of funding outside the purview of the evaluation process, and creates the possibility of the process being authentic, open and genuine. As a facilitating agency, it has been our endeavour that we do not become agents or hatchet men for the donors; we have tried to distinguish ourselves from the donors; we have encouraged the project or the organization to discuss openly the need for an evaluation at that point in time; and, there have been examples where this discussion has led to a decision by the project holders or the NGO not to continue with the evaluation exercise at that point in time. Thus even when a request to us comes from the donor, we try to establish links with the project/NGO, encourage them to assert their interests and to play an active and controlling role in the evaluation process. We believe that we should behave as facilitators of the reflection process of the project or the NGO, and not managers of a process on behalf of the donors.

##### **5. What is the role of outsiders?**

In our context, the debate on outsiders is a perennial one. First of all, it is hard to figure out who is an outsider. The issue of the outsider in a Participatory Evaluation exercise gets posed in the context of subjectivity and objectivity. Many people believe that a project, an organization or movement on its own cannot be critical enough of its own experiences, practices and programmes, and that its self evaluation may be biased, and that it will hide weaknesses and project strengths. In the very definition of Participatory Evaluation, this is a false notion.

If a project, a grass-roots organization, a people's movement is itself interested in critically reflecting on its own experiences, practices and organization, then it is in its own interest to make the process critical, reflective and open, and not to hide or gloss over shortcomings or weak-



nesses. So our concern is not whether this is subjective and biased, because in our view, all such efforts are, in some way or the other, subjective depending on who the subject is.

The issue is, can, without any external assistance, a project, a group, a movement or an organization facilitate the entire process of critical reflection on its own? Will it have the capacity, the competence and the resources to ensure that appropriate and relevant parties and individuals are involved in setting of the objectives, collection of information, in analysis of their information and in acting on the basis of that analysis? It is our experience, as well as our contention, that it is possible in certain circumstances. We have seen that many well organized groups, institutions, movements have this capacity and competence within themselves to carry out, on an ongoing basis, the process, of critical reflection.

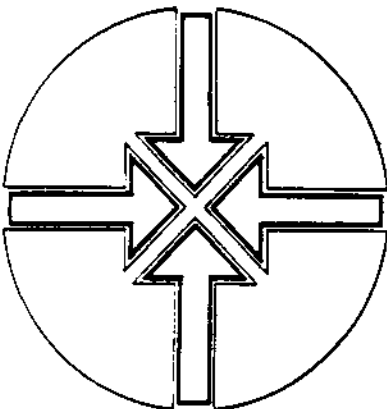
It is also possible that some groups, projects or organizations may not have this capacity and that is where an outside agency or individual could facilitate this process. The role of the outsider in such a situation could be to provide a distance, to help raise issues and questions which may otherwise not get raised or may be difficult to raise, to bring into the open, information and concerns which are generally not so clearly stated, to help in articulating the objectives of an evaluation, to help create methods of information collection and analysis and to help the project or the organization take charge of its own evaluation and use it in its own interest.

There are occasions where we have also played the role of provider of inputs on a particular issue, where we have brought in information or a resource person from outside to share what is happening elsewhere as a contribution to the process of reflection. But in all its diverse roles and activities, the outside agency must continue to ensure that the project or the organization "owns" the evaluation process, feels it is its own and for itself, and gets involved in taking responsibility for it. This does not rule out the possibility of managing, partially, the process of evaluation, particularly the process of data collection.

We have found that in an ongoing organization, members of the group are already over-committed; busy and want us to take the responsibility to ensure that the decisions jointly made with them get implemented (*viz.-a-viz.* collection of information and its analysis). There are situations where an organization deposes a team of its own to manage the process and we essentially play the facilitator's role,

Thus this specific role of the outside agency or individual varies considerably, depending on the given situation and the specific objectives for the evaluation exercise. Any simplistic and universal prescriptions about the outsiders' roles are not warranted in such circumstances.

A related role that we have played on most occasions is that of preparing the report. Invariably, grass-roots organizations have felt that they need a document for future reference and for use inside and outside the organization, which reflects the key findings and the major decisions for follow-up made in an evaluation exercise. It must be stated here that a written



document or an evaluation report is not a necessary ingredient of any Participatory Evaluation exercise. It is essentially a record of the process and the outcome of the exercise, for use by the organization primarily, and by others if it can be a learning experience.

We have found that preparing a draft report on the basis of initial analysis which is jointly shared, helps us to also put our ideas and analysis in place. Invariably, this draft report is then sent back to the organization which discusses it among themselves and then is discussed jointly with the facilitating agency. These discussions on the draft report provide further insights which then become the basis for planning future directions, both of which are incorporated in the final report. We believe that this report is for the organization, and that then it is the responsibility of the organization to decide whether or not to share it with others.

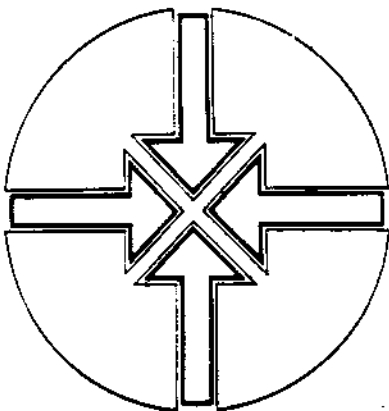
There are also examples of keeping the record of an evaluation experience in audio-visual form. This needs to be further developed and improved.

## 6. The continuity of evaluation

In our definition, a Participatory Evaluation exercise should be seen as an ongoing process of critical reflection within an organization, programme or people's movement. Therefore, it is continuous as well as periodic. After a few years of experience in one area or in one programme or with a certain methodology, it is possible to take time off to reflect on it critically. And this may become an issue-based or event-based evaluation exercise.

Our experience has suggested that the follow-up of the Participatory Evaluation exercise begins to take place during the exercise itself. In almost all the case studies mentioned here, changes in programmes, perspectives and organizations began to be decided upon and implemented during the course of the evaluation process itself. And sometimes the report of the evaluation exercise is essentially a summation of all the decisions made and implemented in the process itself.

Besides, it is also desirable to concretely plan steps for follow-up from the evaluation exercise. In many cases, broad directions are agreed upon and it is here that future steps in planning and implementing those directions need to be set up at the end of a Participatory Evaluation exercise. The role of the outside facilitator or facilitating agency can continue in the follow-up period, but perhaps needs to be re-negotiated. It is our experience that facilitating a critical reflection exercise demands one type of role; and providing input to implement a new programme or create new organizational mechanisms or systems demands quite another role. Thus we see our role as facilitators of an evaluation process terminating with the making of the follow-up plans and we may continue to be involved, but in a different capacity and different role, in implementing those follow-up plans. This possibility of re-negotiation also opens up the choice for the organization to involve other resource persons, resource organizations and expertise from outside, should it so desire.



---

On the whole, the entire set of ideas and practices related to Participatory Evaluation are fairly exciting and creative. We find ourselves continuously challenged and energized in each and every evaluation exercise. Ultimately, the criteria for judging its effectiveness have to be the experiences of those who have initiated and gone through this process. If they have benefited through this process of reflection in some way or the other, then it has contributed to enhancing their capacity for continued work. If they have not, then it has failed in its objectives. As an emerging practice and evolving methodology, much more needs to be shared and analysed about its experiences in India and elsewhere. We hope that this would encourage others to do the same.

