unicef
Office of Research-Innocenti

Methodological Briefs
Impact Evaluation No. 5

Participatory Approaches

Irene Guijt

RMIT UNIVERSITY
3ie International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
BetterEvaluation
unicef Office of Research-Innocenti

UNICEF OFFICE OF RESEARCH

The Office of Research is UNICEF's dedicated research arm. Its prime objectives are to improve international understanding of issues relating to children's rights and to help facilitate full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child across the world. The Office of Research aims to set out a comprehensive framework for research and knowledge within the organization, in support of UNICEF's global programmes and policies, and works with partners to make policies for children evidence-based. Publications produced by the Office are contributions to a global debate on children and child rights issues and include a wide range of opinions.

The views expressed are those of the authors and/or editors and are published in order to stimulate further dialogue on impact evaluation methods. They do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL BRIEFS

UNICEF Office of Research Methodological Briefs are intended to share contemporary research practice, methods, designs, and recommendations from renowned researchers and evaluators. The primary audience is UNICEF staff who conduct, commission or interpret research and evaluation findings to make decisions about programming, policy and advocacy.

This brief has undergone an internal peer review.

The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for errors.

To consult and download the Methodological Briefs, please visit http://www.unicef-irc.org/KM/IE/

For readers wishing to cite this document we suggest the following form:
Guijt, I. (2014). Participatory Approaches, *Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

Acknowledgements: This brief benefited from the guidance of many individuals. The author and the Office of Research wish to thank everyone who contributed and in particular the following:

Contributors: Dugan Fraser, Greet Peersman
Reviewers: Nikola Balvin, Karin Heissler, Rinko Kinoshita

September 2014

UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti
Piazza SS. Annunziata, 12
50122 Florence, Italy
Tel: (+39) 055 20 330
Fax: (+39) 055 2033 220
florence@unicef.org
www.unicef-irc.org

1. PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Using participatory approaches in impact evaluation means involving stakeholders, particularly the participants in a programme or those affected by a given policy, in specific aspects of the evaluation process. The term covers a wide range of different types of participation, which differ in terms of what is understood by 'participation', whose participation is wanted, and what it is that those people are involved in and how.

By asking the question, 'Who should be involved, why and how?' for each step of an impact evaluation, an appropriate and context-specific participatory approach can be developed. Managers of UNICEF evaluations must recognize that being clear about the purpose of participatory approaches in an impact evaluation is an essential first step towards managing expectations and guiding implementation. Is the purpose to ensure that the voices of those whose lives should have been improved by the programme or policy are central to the findings? Is it to ensure a relevant evaluation focus? Is it to hear people's own versions of change rather than obtain an external evaluator's set of indicators? Is it to build ownership of the UNICEF programme? These, and other considerations, would lead to different forms of participation by different combinations of stakeholders in the impact evaluation.

People sometimes assume that 'participatory evaluation' refers to obtaining qualitative data on programme participants' opinions using specific methods such as maps or stories. But this is only one option. Community members can also be involved in designing, implementing and analysing quantitative data (see box 1) or in overseeing the work of technical experts.

Participatory approaches can be used in any impact evaluation design – they are not exclusive to specific evaluation methods or restricted to quantitative or qualitative data collection and analysis. Participation by stakeholders can occur at any stage of the impact evaluation process: in its design, in data collection, in analysis, in reporting and in managing the study. Participation can mean involving children directly and/or those who represent children's interests. During data collection, a survey can be made as participatory as a group mapping exercise, while an external reference group to guide the evaluation may include programme participants as part of a participatory approach. The needs and decisions about the type and extent of participation will be different for an impact evaluation that focuses on local level impacts to one that examines policy or governance-related national changes.

Box 1. Participatory evaluation: Going beyond the rhetoric

Although 'empowerment' is a prominent value in the field of international development, attempts to monitor and measure it have largely relied on indicators determined by external people for external use. These approaches assumed that people's own assessments would be too simple and qualitative, impossible to aggregate, and could only be analysed with considerable facilitation. Dee Jupp's work with a social movement in Bangladesh challenges such perceptions:

> "Groups assess themselves using indicators generated earlier through a participatory process; the indicators are many – 132; an elegant method quantifies and aggregates them to show distributions, trends and surprises; local people themselves facilitate group analysis, releasing staff time and avoiding deferential responses; and people enthusiastically give time to assessments because they are important for their own learning, planning and progress."

It was a difficult process, as salaried field staff felt threatened by some findings and donor agencies were initially sceptical, until they directly experienced the usefulness of group reflections.

Source: Jupp, Dee, et al., 'Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them, Quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own analysis', Sida Studies in Evaluation 2010:1, Sida, 2010, p. 9.

Impact evaluations commonly meet the needs of commissioning funders but can and should also serve the needs of other stakeholders, including programme participants or those affected by a policy. Given the diversity of options, evaluation managers and implementers must be clear about why and how different stakeholders can be meaningfully involved, in order to know how to make the impact evaluation relevant and ensure that it is used by its key stakeholders.

Main points

1. Participatory approaches are not about a 'single' method but about a way of undertaking impact evaluation that is meaningful to different stakeholders – and specifically to programme participants.
2. Many opportunities exist to use participatory approaches in impact evaluation, so it is important to systematically think through who is best involved in which aspect of the evaluation, and to be clear about the purpose of more or different forms of participation.
3. Participatory approaches can be used in any impact evaluation design, and with both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

2. WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO USE THIS METHOD?

The underlying rationale for choosing a participatory approach to impact evaluation can be either pragmatic or ethical, or a combination of the two. Pragmatic because better evaluations are achieved (i.e., better data, better understanding of the data, more appropriate recommendations, better uptake of findings); ethical because it is the right thing to do (i.e., people have a right to be involved in informing decisions that will directly or indirectly affect them, as stipulated by the UN human rights-based approach to programming, see HRBA Portal).

Given these potential benefits, participation in evaluation is often presented as a win-win situation (see box 2). Such benefits are not guaranteed, however. Building stakeholder participation into an impact evaluation needs to be meaningful and feasible, with ethical dimensions carefully considered. Being clear and explicit about the value(s) and purpose(s) of participation is essential.

Box 2. Reported benefits of using participatory approaches in impact evaluation

1. To improve accuracy and relevance of reported impacts by:
   - listening to the lived experiences of programme participants and local implementers, to confirm if impact was achieved as intended, but also has it emerged through unintended positive and negative impacts
   - validating findings, and agreeing relevant lessons learned or recommendations.
2. To establish and explain causality – by listening to different perspectives on causal chains, synthesizing these and verifying these with different stakeholder groups.
3. To improve understanding of the intervention, especially among decision makers and senior staff – by involving decision makers in participatory data collection, analysis and feedback.
4. To improve project performance through active, adaptive implementation of the intervention by project staff and programme participants or those living with policy changes, by:
   - making them curious about performance through involvement in setting locally relevant evaluation questions and in data analysis
   - joint generation of recommendations to build on emerging impacts (or lack thereof).
5. To improve the interventions that have been evaluated by:
   - having more accurate findings of change and causal explanations
   - validating and revising the theory of change with programme participants and implementers, and basing the intervention on an up-to-date and robust understanding
   - developing leadership, building team understanding and building local capacity to reflect critically.

The starting point for any impact evaluation intending to use participatory approaches lies in clarifying what value this will add to the evaluation itself as well as to the people who would be closely involved (but also including potential risks of their participation). Three questions need to be answered in each situation: (1) What purpose will stakeholder participation serve in this impact evaluation?; (2) Whose participation matters, when and why?; and (3) When is participation feasible? Only after this can the question of how to make impact evaluation more participatory be answered (see section 3).

The three questions are interlinked – answering them is iterative and depends on what is feasible (see below). For example, a participatory process might seek to transform power relations, which often requires investing in building the capacity of less experienced stakeholders in evaluation and allowing more time than would be necessary if using a team of external evaluators. If these conditions cannot be met, however, then all three questions must be revisited.

1. What purpose will stakeholder participation serve in this impact evaluation?

Deciding to use participatory approaches involves a philosophical position: Whose needs should the impact evaluation meet – those of the funders, the implementers, the policymakers, the intended programme participants or others? The needs that are prioritized will define the purpose of the impact evaluation and influence the evaluation questions, the type of data to be collected, how data are collected and analysed and by whom, and how the findings are shared and used. The priority needs will also determine whether or not the impact evaluation needs to be participatory and if it can be conducted safely in a participatory manner. If not, it should be made explicit why not. In the case of

sensitive interventions, for example, projects tackling illegal child marriage practices, participants may run risks by sharing information. If the evaluation cannot guarantee personal safety, then expectations around participation must be downgraded.

As noted above, participation by programme recipients can be justified on pragmatic grounds, for example, to obtain more diverse and honest accounts of the effects of programmes on children and their caregivers. This could lead to an impact study that emphasizes methods that enable children to share their experiences or opinions. But participation can also be pursued out of a belief that development should be driven by local people's needs, including children (see box 3). In such a case, children's values and needs would help to shape the evaluation questions, and children might be involved in validating findings and formulating recommendations. Where an organization or intervention has a philosophical commitment to participation, participatory impact evaluation can contribute significantly to the empowerment aim by giving programme participants a central voice in assessing impacts and operations and influencing decisions.

Box 3. Why involving children in evaluation is important

- It is a human right to participate and express views, needs and experiences.
- Children have their own views, and these may well differ from those of adults.
- Children have needs and experiences that must be considered when making decisions that affect children.

'Stakeholder participation' could potentially involve anyone with an interest (even a marginal one) in the evaluation, from co-designers of the evaluation to those who will share their experiences. Deciding who can and should be invited to contribute to an impact evaluation requires careful thought. So, when evaluation proposals do not go beyond a statement such as 'We will involve all stakeholders', it is safe to conclude that insufficient thought has been given to the question of who matters. And it is also important to be explicit about who will be involved, and why, when and how, as each of these considerations has implications for evaluation implementation.

While participatory approaches may involve a range of different stakeholders, particular attention should be paid to meaningful participation of programme participants in the evaluation process (i.e., doing evaluation 'with' and 'by' programme participants rather than 'of' or 'for' them). Table 1 suggests four types of participation by programme participants and outlines what each means for undertaking evaluation in practice. These highlight the importance of clarifying how terms such as 'participation' and 'involvement' are defined. It can help to avoid situations when consultation of programme participants' opinions is assumed to be empowering simply because it is labelled 'participatory' or situations when commitments are made without making appropriate resources available.

Table 1. Types of participation by programme participants in impact evaluation

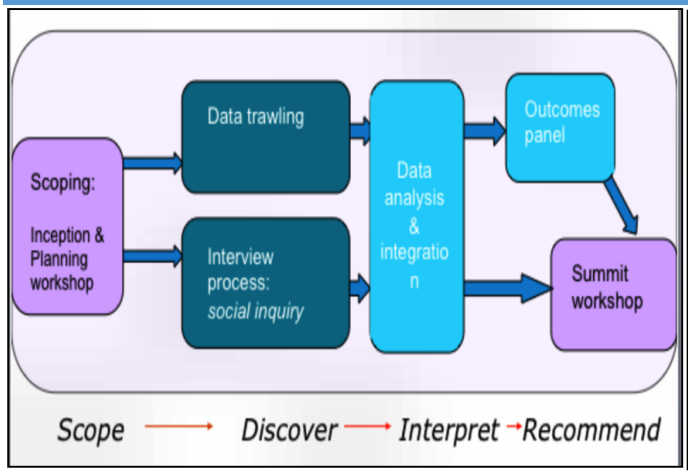
Type of participation	What participation means to commissioners of impact evaluation	What participation means to programme participants	Levels of participation
Nominal – for children and their caregivers	Legitimation – to show that they are doing something about stakeholder involvement	Inclusion – to gain access to potential benefits	To show that participants' input in impact evaluation is possible and how it can be done For example, data collected from a sample of children and their caregivers
Instrumental – for (and with) children and their caregivers	Efficiency – to make projects more relevant and cost-effective, limit funders' input and draw on community contributions	Cost – time spent on project-related labour and other activities, but potentially benefiting from more relevant projects or programmes via policy/practice change	As a means of achieving cost-effectiveness and of drawing on and building local capacities For example, training children as data collectors; data collection by children from children
Representative – with (and by) children and their caregivers	Sustainability and fairness – to avoid creating dependency and to reduce inequitable benefits	Leverage – to influence and shape the intervention and its management	To give people a voice in determining their own development *For example, children's and caregivers' representatives are consulted about the evaluation design and invited to comment on findings, help identify lessons learned and determine appropriate action steps*
Transformative – by children and their caregivers	Empowerment – to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Participation is both a means and an end – a continuing dynamic *For example, children and their caregivers identify key evaluation questions, and help to design and organize data collection methods, analyse data and identify recommendations or action steps*

Source: Inspired by Cornwall, Andrea, 'Unpacking "Participation": Models, meanings and practices', Community Development Journal, 43 (3), July 2008, pp. 269–283.

2. Whose participation matters, when and why in this impact evaluation?

In practice, it will never be possible or even desirable to include every stakeholder. Even in situations that seek empowerment (see table 1), issues such as financial feasibility and time availability for the evaluation will determine what is possible. For example, if a programme is keen to involve children in identifying evaluation questions, then an age-appropriate role and process must be identified that goes beyond a tokenistic involvement of children in data collection. Compromises will be needed, and so will prioritization of different stakeholders at different stages of the evaluation. Box 4 illustrates an approach that could be either 'representative' (see table 1) or 'transformative' if programme participants are involved as early on as the evaluation planning, depending on what key decision makers consider feasible and useful in terms of stakeholder participation.

Box 4. Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique (CORT)



- In planning workshop – key stakeholders and staff
- In data review – usually staff
- In follow-up interviews to fill information gaps – volunteer staff, programme participants
- In outcomes panel – experts with no vested interest, or cross-examination of experts by citizens
- At summit workshop – many stakeholders
- In workshop to reassess programme logic – staff

Source: Dart, Jess, 'Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique (CORT)', web page, BetterEvaluation, 2010. See http://betterevaluation.org/resource/overview/collaborative_outcome_reporting_technique.

The BetterEvaluation Rainbow Framework provides a good overview of the key stages in the evaluation process during which the question 'Who is best involved?' can be asked. These stages involve: managing the impact evaluation, defining and framing the evaluation focus, collecting data on impacts, explaining impacts, synthesizing findings, and reporting on and supporting the use of the findings (see box 5). The question of 'who' is important to involve includes children and/or those who represent children.

Box 5. Asking who should and can participate in which parts of the impact evaluation process

1. MANAGE

Manage an evaluation (or a series of evaluations), including deciding who will conduct the evaluation and who will make decisions about it.

- Who should be invited to participate in managing the impact evaluation? Who will be involved in deciding what is to be evaluated?
- Who will have the authority to make what kind of decisions?
- Who will decide about the evaluators? Who will be involved in developing and/or approving the evaluation design/evaluation plan?
- Who will undertake the impact evaluation?
- Whose values will determine what a good quality impact evaluation looks like?
- What capacities may need to be strengthened to undertake or make the best use of an impact evaluation?

2. DEFINE

Develop a description (or access an existing version) of what is to be evaluated and how it is understood to work.

- Who will be involved in revising or creating a theory of change on which the impact evaluation will reflect?
- Who will be involved in identifying possible unintended results (both positive and negative) that will be important?

3. FRAME

Set the parameters of the evaluation – its purposes, key evaluation questions and the criteria and standards to be used.

- Who will decide the purpose of the impact evaluation?
- Who will set the evaluation questions?
- Whose criteria and standards matter in judging performance?

4. DESCRIBE

Collect and retrieve data to answer descriptive questions about the activities of the project/programme/policy, the various results it has had and the context in which it has been implemented.

- Who will decide whose voice matters in terms of describing, explaining and judging impacts?
- Who will help to identify the measures or indicators to be evaluated?
- Who will collect or retrieve data?
- Who will be involved in organizing and storing the data?

5. UNDERSTAND CAUSES

Collect and analyse data to answer causal questions about what has produced the outcomes and impacts that have been observed.

- Who will be involved in checking whether results are consistent with the theory that the intervention produced them?
- Who will decide what to do with contradictory information? Whose voice will matter most and why?
- Who will be consulted to identify possible alternative explanations for impacts?

6. SYNTHESIZE

Combine data to form an overall assessment of the merit or worth of the intervention, or to summarize evidence across several evaluations.

- Who will be involved in synthesizing data?
- Who will be involved in identifying recommendations or lessons learned?

7. REPORT AND SUPPORT USE

Develop and present findings in ways that are useful for the intended users of the evaluation, and support them to make use of findings.

- Who will share the findings?
- Who will be given access to the findings? Will this be done in audience-appropriate ways?
  Which users will be encouraged and adequately supported to make use of the findings?

Source: Author's own questions based on the seven clusters of evaluation tasks in the BetterEvaluation Rainbow Framework.

3. When is participation in impact evaluation feasible?

Much participatory work in evaluation has been criticized for being tokenistic. There is no shortage of examples of evaluations that have consulted with programme participants to elicit their opinions, and which have labelled this as participatory and claimed it to be empowering.

To reduce the likelihood of tokenistic participation involves checking that the participation intended is feasible. Are the conditions in place that will lead to ethical and meaningful participation (see table 1) in line with the intended purpose? For example, engaging children in identifying useful evaluation questions or indicators will require certain conditions (see box 6). Similar considerations apply for situations when children's caregivers are involved. When young people carry out participatory evaluations, a facilitator skilled in capacity building and in promoting participation may be the key to success.[1] Investing in young people's capacity and their ownership of evaluation results will require time, commitment, capacities to deal with power differences during data collection, analysis and decision making, and resources to enable such a process.

[1] Gawler, Meg, *Useful Tools for Engaging Young People in Participatory Evaluation*, UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office, New York, 2005. See http://www.artemis-services.com/downloads/tools-for-participatory-evaluation.pdf.

Box 6. Basic considerations for children's participation

- A child-friendly environment.
- Confidence and credibility of the facilitator.
- Respect for ethics and values.
- Role and skills of the facilitator, and ability to adapt to the sociocultural context.
- Simple and child-friendly tools, with the flexibility to adapt to subject under discussion and age group of participating children.

Source: Samaranayake, Mallika, 'Children and Evaluation', webinar, BetterEvaluation, 5 February 2014. See http://betterevaluation.org/blog/evaluating_with_children

Just as skilled field researchers are essential to conventional household surveys, specific facilitation skills are essential to ensuring that participation is meaningful and feasible (see section 4).

It is important to spend time understanding what might motivate different people to be actively involved in impact evaluation. Box 7 summarizes a range of possible motivations for different stakeholders. What factors are influencing those who may be invited to participate? Can the evaluation process create the conditions so that these factors are in place?

Box 7. Factors influencing people's participation in impact evaluation

- Perceived benefits (and partial or short-term costs) of the impact study.
- Relevance of the impact evaluation to the priorities of participating groups.
- Quick and relevant feedback of findings.
- Flexibility of the process to deal with diverse and changing information needs.
- Meeting expectations that arise from the study such as acting on any recommendations that are made.
- Degree of maturity, capacity, leadership and identity of groups involved, including ability to share power.
- Local political history, as this influences society's openness to stakeholder initiatives.
- Whether participants' short-term needs are dealt with, while also considering longer-term information needs.
- Material incentives to make the study possible (e.g., pens, books, etc.).

Source: Guijt, Irene, et al., 'Tracking change together', *PLA Notes*, 31, 1998, pp. 28–36.

3. HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

This section discusses several ways in which participatory methods can be used in impact evaluation, using examples of specific applications. It should be noted that any method must be piloted to ensure that it is useful and feasible. This is even more so the case for participatory methods that require a

contextualized understanding of what is needed to ensure safe and open engagement with the participants. In addition, piloting is also critical to ensure that locally relevant indicators or variables are assessed (see box 8).

Box 8. Ensuring relevance and utility by piloting

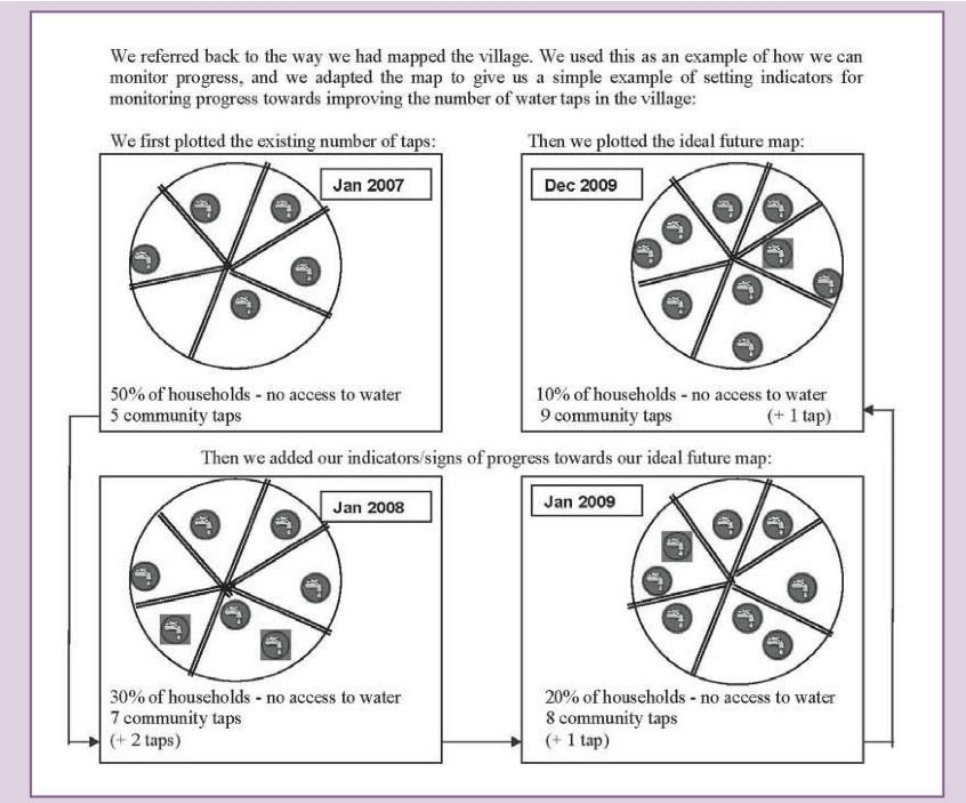
A new method was developed to assess the effects on children of a life skills programme. The method, called 'picture talk', needed to be tested to ensure that it could safely uncover the subtle effects on children's capacity to respond more effectively to risk situations. Picture talk illustrated 12 problem scenarios, each involving a boy and a girl. Children were asked to comment on how the girl or boy would respond if they saw this scenario unfold. The scenarios were identified through group discussions with children and staff of an implementing non-governmental organization, and had been piloted, revised and selected because they depicted the most common risk or conflict situations likely to be experienced by children in daily life.

Source: Zaveri, Sonal, 'Listening to smaller voices: Using an innovative participatory tool for children affected by HIV and AIDS to assess a life skills programme', BetterEvaluation, 2013. See http://betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Listening%20to%20smaller%20voices%20-%20Sonal%20Zaveri.pdf.

1. Using participatory methods to collect qualitative and quantitative impact data

Participatory approaches are regularly assumed to mean the same as 'using qualitative data collection methods'. For example, the story-based Most Significant Change method (see boxes 14 and 15) is often cited as participatory. But participatory methods can also be used to collect quantitative information on specific changes. Dee Jupp's participatory survey approach (see box 1) is an example of transformational evaluation that includes numbers. Using visualizations generated through group discussions, for example, can show quantitative changes (see box 9).

Box 9. Before and after maps



Source: Sempere, Kas, 'Counting Seeds for Change', South Africa Reflect Network, Johannesburg, 2009, p. 101. See http://www.reflect-action.org/sites/default/files/u5/Reflect%20Evaluation%20Framework%20-%20English.pdf.

2. Using participatory methods to investigate causality

More can be achieved with participatory methods than only group-based data collection of impacts on programme participants – causality can also be investigated in interviews and focus group discussions. Discussion methods using impact or causal flow diagrams[2] can help to establish respondents' understandings of key factors that have contributed to the impacts they identify. When combined with point 1 above, these methods can elicit qualitative and quantitative information within the same discussion, including around the relative contribution of different causes.

3. Using participatory methods to negotiate differences and to validate key findings

Unlike statistical surveys, where analysts can take the numbers and produce a single set of responses, participatory processes include moments of differing views and contestation. Information is generated and debated collectively, with differing opinions raised about the validity of data, about key causes and about the impacts themselves. Methods exist that, with robust facilitation, can help

[2] For a description of causal flow diagrams, see 'Flow diagrams', web page, Reflect, http://www.reflect-action.org/node/58.

people to overcome differences or 'agree to disagree', for example, citizen juries which give children or their caregivers the opportunity to listen to and challenge the interim findings of experts (see box 10). An alternative method is to allow different groups – such as girls, boys, female and male caregivers or the elderly – to prioritize impacts and their causes separately, present these, and then identify where agreement exists and where experiences differ.[3] Participatory methods can also help to confirm the extent to which local people and project staff agree on the validity of findings drafted by the external evaluators.

Box 10. Citizen juries with children in the United Kingdom

A Young Person's Reference Group was held in which young people commented on draft jury questions, suggested witnesses and shaped the length of witness presentations and the nature of the question sessions. The jurors in London were 10 young people aged between 16 and 22 years old; those in Edinburgh were five mothers and five fathers. Each jury heard from six witnesses, to identify how government could increase children/young people's well-being and happiness in the UK.

The three-day jury processes involved a 'meet-and-greet session', in which the jurors met together to hear about the project and the jury process. During the witness day, the six 45-minute witness sessions each began with a 10-minute witness statement followed by a question time for jurors to clarify and probe. After each witness session, jurors had a 30-minute break to take stock and to prepare for the next witness. A final deliberative session brought the jurors together to reflect on what they had heard the day before, drawing also on their own knowledge and experiences. The jury together developed its recommendations. Recommendations from the children's jury and the parents' jury were aggregated into one set of recommendations.

Source: Action for Children and the New Economics Foundation, How can government act to increase the well-being and happiness of children and young people in the UK?, Action for Children/NEF, 2009. See http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/62888/citizens_jury_report.pdf.

4. Using participatory methods to score people's appreciation of an intervention's impact

Methods exist that can democratically score the extent to which citizens value an intervention's impact on their lives. Matrix ranking,[4] ladders (see box 11) and 'spider' diagrams[5] are visualizations of detailed discussions, either with individuals or with groups, about the relative appreciation of the intervention or specific changes. These methods can be used to compare and quantify a wide range of topics such as different types of changes (e.g., confidence, capacity or motivation), different degrees of change for one impact (see box 11) and different causes of change.

3 Guijt, Irene, et al., 'Agreeing to Disagree: Dealing with Age and Gender in Redd Barna Uganda', in I. Guijt and M. Kaul Shah (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, ITDG Publishing, London, 1999.

4 Mukherjee, Neela, et al., 'Project benefit-impact matrix from the Maldives – a method for participatory evaluation', PLA Notes, 35, 1999, pp. 13–15. See http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G01827.pdf.

5 Edwards, Michael, 'Using PRA in organisational self-assessment', *PLA Notes*, 29, 1997, pp. 10–14. http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G01695.pdf.

Box 11. Example of a ladder of scores for a community-level assessment

0. No women in management functions at all, or only in name.
1. Women are members of the lower-level management organization but do not regularly attend meetings.
2. Women members take part in meetings of lower-level management organizations, but not in decision-making.
3. Women members attend meetings of lower-level management organizations and take decisions together with men.
4. Both women and men participate in meetings of higher-level management organizations and take decisions jointly.

Source: Dayal, Rekha, et al., 'Methodology for participatory assessments, With Communities, Institutions and Policy Makers', Metguide, 2000, p. 20. See http://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/global_metguideall.pdf.

5. Using participatory methods to assess impacts in relation to wider developments in the intervention area

Instead of looking at the interventions of only one organization, the participatory assessment of development (PADev) approach[6] studies changes in a region over a specified period, and then tries to find out which interventions contributed to which changes. This process has yielded valuable information for those operating in the area: they learn about their own impact vis-à-vis other actors, and they also find out which types of projects have been most effective in that particular geographical and cultural setting. It thus provides lessons for future interventions.

The PADev process involves gathering information about changes and intervention impacts through three-day workshops in which key local groups participate: women and men, elderly and young people, the poorer and the wealthier, people without formal education and university graduates, and farmers and officials. Good facilitation has proven key to ensuring meaningful and safe sharing among such diverse groups.

4. ETHICAL CONCERNS

Observing ethical standards is important in all evaluations, and even more so when children and young people or other vulnerable groups are involved as informants or evaluators, as they are especially susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Two types of ethical concerns are paramount when using participatory approaches in impact evaluation: (1) those that pertain to evaluation in general, and (2) those that pertain specifically to participatory evaluation.

[6] See 'Participatory Assessment of Development', web page, PADev, http://www.padev.nl.

1. Ethical concerns related to evaluation practices in general

These focus on:

- clarifying the evaluation purpose and potential impacts of participation on children in terms of costs and harm or benefits (individual and/or social), using ethical supervision to ensure that the evaluation benefits children
- seeking the views of children and young people in all matters that affect them
- obtaining agreement to participate, ensuring that everyone understands the conditions of agreement based on the full information – with the option and ability to withdraw at any time – and ensuring that the evaluation processes do not reinforce patterns of exclusion or exploitation
- ensuring additional safeguards for those who are most vulnerable as well as ensuring the appropriate skills and supervision of any adults involved.

(See also Brief No. 1, Overview of Impact Evaluation and Brief No. 12, Interviewing and the Ethical Guidance page on the Child Ethics website.)

2. Ethical concerns related to participatory practice (and therefore also participatory impact evaluation)

Good practice guidelines have emerged in recent years following three decades of participatory development work.[7] Given the many ways in which participatory evaluation can be interpreted (see table 1), being clear about the implications of participatory work is important to avoid excessive claims, poor practice and dashed expectations. Box 12 summarizes key insights from practitioners.

Box 12. Ethical concerns related to participatory work

1. Does the process contain time to think and flexibility so that work can be modified en route?
2. Does the process include ways to share findings with key stakeholders?
3. Is there someone who will support and promote the process?
4. Will it be possible to involve people in different areas outside the initial brief?
5. Does the process include the intention of promoting action and change at community level?
6. Does the process involve local people and help to build their skills?
7. Does the process have the capacity to cope with unexpected findings?
8. Can you find good facilitators for this process, with clear criteria for selection?
9. Are key stakeholders informed about the process, with enough time to understand and engage with it and its findings?

For the full guidelines, see http://ppfcuk.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/ppfccoreprinciples.pdf

[7] Rowley J with Doyle M, Hay S and the Participatory Practitioners for Change (PPfC) members. (2013) Can we define ethical standards for participatory work? PLA Notes 66: 91-101. http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/14620IIED.pdf

5. WHICH OTHER METHODS WORK WELL WITH THIS ONE?

This brief is not about specific participatory methods but about a way of undertaking impact evaluation in a participatory manner. As the many examples in this brief show, a wide range of methods is available and skills are needed. Participation in impact evaluation is not about obtaining qualitative data on programme participants' opinions using a few specific data collection methods. Any method or combination of methods can be used in a participatory manner. What is important is aligning the level and nature of stakeholder engagement with the combination of methods needed to answer the evaluation questions.

6. PARTICIPATION IN ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK OF RESULTS

Analysis, the process of making sense of information, has several stages: collating data, identifying strong patterns in the data around impacts and their causes, and validation of draft conclusions. When undertaken in a participatory mode, analysis takes place with those to whom the findings will be relevant. Hence, stages of analysis can be merged with feedback of results (see box 13). Where this is unfeasible or undesirable, analysis and feedback to stakeholders must be planned for as separate stages.

Box 13. Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique

1. **Outcomes panel**. The panel brings together people with relevant scientific, technical, local or sectoral knowledge to examine a range of evidence compiled by consultants. Together they assess the contribution of the intervention towards goals. This outcomes or expert panel is usually facilitated, but a citizen's jury is also possible (see box 10).

2. **Summit workshop**. The outcomes are then shared at a large workshop, where instances of significant change are selected, and key findings and recommendations are synthesized. The summit involves the broad participation of key stakeholders, including programme staff and community members.

Source: Dart, Jess, 'Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique (CORT)', web page, BetterEvaluation, 2010. See http://betterevaluation.org/resource/overview/collaborative_outcome_reporting_technique.

While it is easy to generate much interesting and unusual information through participatory processes, the vast amounts of data and their often-fragmented nature make processing a time-consuming task. Furthermore, there are key issues that need to be resolved and agreed, ideally at the evaluation planning stage: When does analysis happen in a participatory evaluation? How and by whom is learning represented? How can differing the perspectives – on key impacts and their causes – of poor, near-poor and non-poor households be integrated and validated? Whose perspective is prioritized?

Analysis requires thinking about:

- Defining 'quality' in analysis – is it about conclusions that have been pondered by many people? Under what conditions is enough opportunity given for meaningful input without sliding into participation fatigue?
- Sequencing of analytical steps and who to involve when and with what support.
- Facilitation skills, for example, to ensure that methods are used for critical reflection on impacts and their causes.

Many insights emerge during the analysis stage, so thinking carefully about who needs to be involved to build commitment to act on findings is one way to determine the level of participation. But the ideal people may not want to be involved in what is a time-consuming task. Analysis also requires specific capacities, depending on the complexity of the impact evaluation design. For example, regression analysis cannot be left up to anyone lacking the relevant skills, and neither can a causal flow diagram discussion with child-headed households. Importantly, in participatory evaluation, critics point out that conclusions seem to emerge without sufficient thought as to the power dynamics that prioritized some information over other information, some people's views over others' views, and some conclusions over other conclusions.

Box 14 describes an analytical approach to harvesting significant change stories, which integrates data collection and analysis. Box 15 illustrates analysis using a combination of participatory video and the Most Significant Change method. With participatory video, analysis happens at every stage, especially with regular community screenings. These are organized after each participatory video monitoring and evaluation activity and are to be documented well, as they often yield new findings, are a fertile ground for ideas, and offer the opportunity to triangulate information or to help groups reach new common ground.

Box 14. Most Significant Change

The Most Significant Change process involves the collection of significant change stories of programme or policy impact emanating from the community level. Panels of designated stakeholders or staff then systematically select from this collection those stories that are most significant. Participants in this type of evaluation are initially involved by seeking out stories about programme or policy impact from diverse sources. Once changes have been identified and documented, selected groups of people such as programme participants (in mixed or homogenous groups) sit down together, read the stories aloud and have in-depth discussions about the value of reported changes, to identify those that they collectively agree are the most significant stories. In large programmes, there may be multiple levels at which such stories are pooled and then selected. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact.

Source: Davies, Rick, and Dart, Jess, 'The "Most Significant Change" (MSC) Technique, A guide to its use', R.J. Davies and J. Dart, 2005. See http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf.

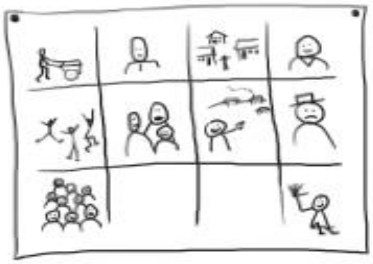
Box 15. **Participatory video and Most Significant Change technique as developed and practised by InsightShare**

How it works

How it works: Participatory Video and the Most Significant Change Technique

1. Baseline

Participatory Video process

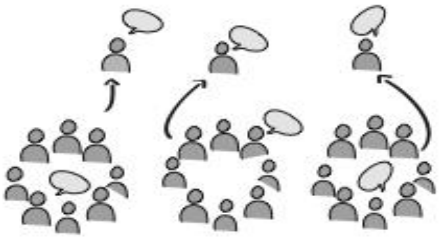


At the beginning of an M&E cycle beneficiary community members and staff involved in project delivery are given the opportunity to take part in a Participatory Video (PV) process and to make their own film.

PV games are used in tandem with experiential and action-based learning tools to encourage group cohesion. The group is supported in using the camera to explore and document key issues faced by their community.

2. Midline

Collection of Most Significant Change (MSC) stories



Halfway through the M&E cycle, stories of Most Significant Change are collected through structured story circles. One story from each circle is selected as 'most significant'. This is video recorded as a testimony and may be acted out as a drama.

3. Evaluation

Identification of key themes + selection of MSC stories

The stories collected during the midline phase are analysed by participants. Key themes are identified and stories are grouped according to 'domains' of change.

These video stories are then screened to different audiences who discuss the stories and identify which are most significant for them.

4. Dissemination

Sharing of findings

The findings are shared in project appropriate ways that maximise opportunities for feedback and learning.

Each project, and its context, is different, and no two PV MSC processes will be the same.
Every InsightShare project is specifically tailor-made to fit with local circumstances and to meet our partners' needs.
This outline is intended to give an overview of the way we use PV with MSC without being proscriptive. It describes how we use PV with MSC in a capacity building context, over 3 or 4 distinctive visits/stages.

Source: InsightShare, 'How it works: Participatory Video and the Most Significant Change Technique', InsightShare, Oxford, 2012. See http://www.insightshare.org/sites/insightshare.org/files/Participatory%20Video%20and%20the%20Most%20Significant%20Change%20Technique%20-%20How%20it%20works.pdf.

7. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Much is claimed of participatory approaches used in evaluation, including impact evaluation: it is 'empowering', 'cost-effective', 'more accurate' and 'more relevant'. But critics of participatory approaches have made counterclaims, labelling it 'bad research', 'subjective', 'tokenistic' and even 'tyrannical'. This brief offers many examples of good practice, with ideas to ensure ethical, feasible and useful processes. Clarity about expected standards of participatory work – as appropriate for the intended purpose(s) and feasibility in that context – is essential to managing expectations and guiding relevant and useful participation of stakeholders in impact evaluation.

The benefits of participation in impact evaluation are neither automatic nor guaranteed. Commissioning such approaches means committing to the implications for timing, resources and focus. Facilitation skills are essential to ensuring a good quality process, which in turn may require additional resources for building capacity. The experience acquired from decades of participatory development has led to calls for some much-needed quality assurance:

> "The opportunities are to initiate and sustain processes of change: empowering disadvantaged people and communities, transforming organisations; and reorienting individuals. The dangers come from demanding too much, in a top-down mode, too fast, with too little understanding of participatory development and its implications."[8]

Good practice in impact evaluation starts with clarity about the purpose of participation, which lays the foundation for an appropriate impact evaluation design. Implementation requires attention to and dedicated effort in terms of: (1) personal and professional values and behaviour; (2) ethical community engagement, awareness of local power differences and conditions for engagement, and investment in local capacities; (3) organizational structures, styles and management that align with participatory impact evaluation design and implementation; (4) approaches and methods in training, to avoid a method-driven approach; and (5) policies and practices of funding agencies to support meaningful participatory evaluation.

Challenges are encountered when:

- the purpose of participation in impact evaluation is unclear and not aligned with its design, and the absence of basic conditions leads to short cuts in participatory processes that overstate benefits
- skilled facilitation[9] is insufficiently invested in, perpetuating power differences that lead to domination by the vocal few in the seven task areas of an impact evaluation (see box 5)
- one understanding of rigour is allowed to dominate over another (e.g., those for good participatory practice versus those for statistically valid data) without considering what would constitute an appropriate hybrid for a specific context
- attention is given to participation in data collection only and not also to other tasks in an impact evaluation (see box 5)
- there is inadequate understanding of and reflection on the local context and cultural norms of participation, including gender relations, and their implications for impact evaluation design and implementation.

[8] Absalom, Elkanah, et al., 'Sharing our concerns and looking to the future', *PLA Notes*, 22, 1995, pp. 5–10. See http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G01554.pdf.

[9] See the International Institute for Environment and Development *PLA Notes* series for many facilitation tips, for example, Braakman, Lydia, 'The art of facilitating participation: unlearning old habits and learning new ones', *PLA Notes*, 48, 2003. See http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G02061.pdf.

Participatory impact evaluation is a frontier for evaluation practice, as is evident from the lack of specific UNICEF examples on which this brief was able to draw. The concept of rigour will need to be reconsidered, as information gathered through participatory methods is erroneously perceived by critics as lacking in scientific rigour, which may be a specific (donor) concern in impact evaluation. Ensuring appropriate triangulation of different data sources – as in any good mixed method impact evaluation – is important to maximize the credibility of findings. To obtain more examples of true participation in impact evaluation will require investment in a number of areas, including capacity building and innovation, through creative facilitators and researchers, and organizations keen to support innovation in impact evaluation.

8. KEY READINGS AND LINKS

Chambers, Robert, Making the Poor Count: Using Participatory Options for Impact Evaluation, in R. Chambers, D. Karlan, M. Ravallion and P. Rogers (eds.), 'Designing impact evaluations: different perspectives', *International Initiative for Impact Evaluation Working Paper* No. 4, 3ie, New Delhi, 2009. See http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2012/05/07/Working_Paper_4.pdf.

Gohl, Eberhard, et al., NGO-IDEAs Impact Toolbox, Participatory Monitoring of Outcome and Impact, VENRO/NGO-IDEAs, Bonn, 2011. See www.ngo-ideas.net/impact_toolbox.

Guijt, Irene, and John Gaventa, 'Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Learning from Change', *IDS Policy Briefing* No. 12, University of Sussex, Brighton, 1998. See http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/PB12.pdf.

Hart, Roger A., 'Children's participation, From tokenism to citizenship', *Innocenti Essays* No. 4, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, 1992. See www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf.

Holland, Jeremy (ed.), *Who Counts? The Power of Participatory Statistics,* Practical Action Publishing, UK, 2013.

Johnson, V., 'Valuing Children's Knowledge: Is Anybody Listening?', in C. Roche, R. Eyben and I. Guijt (eds.), *The Politics of Evidence*, Practical Action Publishing, UK (forthcoming).

Molina, G., et al., 'Child-friendly participatory research tools', *PLA Notes*, 60, 2009, pp. 160–166.

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation Evaluation Department, 'A Framework for Analysing Participation in Development', Report 1/2013, Norad, 2013. See http://www.oecd.org/derec/norway/NORWAY_A_FrameworkforAnalysingParticipationDevelopment.pdf.

Sette, Cristina, 'Participatory Evaluation', web page, BetterEvaluation. See http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation.

White, Sarah C., 'Depoliticising development: the uses and abuses of participation', *Development in Practice*, 6 (1), 1996, pp. 6–15...

GLOSSARY

Causality	*The principle that one variable (X) produces change in another variable (Y). It is based on the assumption that events occur in a predictable, non-random way, and that one event leads to, or causes, another. To establish causation, the two variables must be associated or correlated with each other; the first variable (X) must precede the second variable (Y) in time and space; and alternative, non-causal explanations for the relationship (such as spurious ones) must be eliminated. Events in the physical and social worlds are generally too complex to be explained by any single factor. For this reason, scientists are guided by the principle of multiple causation, which states that one event occurs as a result of several factors operating or occurring in combination.*
Citizen jury	*A participatory evaluation method in which a representative sample of citizens acts as jurors on an issue that affects their community. The jurors' task is to gather information, examine the evidence and consider different arguments, before providing informed opinions and recommendations, and making a final judgement as would be the case in a legal jury.*
Focus group discussion	*A qualitative research technique in which a group of participants (approx. 10) of common demographics, attitudes, or purchase patterns are led through a discussion on a particular topic by a trained moderator.*
Impact	*Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (OECD-DAC definition, 2010)*
Impact evaluation	*An evaluation that provides information about the impacts produced by an intervention. It can be undertaken of a programme or a policy, or upstream work – such as capacity building, policy advocacy and support for an enabling environment. It goes beyond looking only at goals and objectives to also examine unintended impacts. See: impact.*
Matrix ranking	*A participatory evaluation method in which different independent variables (e.g. project activities) are described and scored in terms of impact (e.g. on individuals, group, community) by a community sample. The scoring is followed by a discussion of the impacts, their status and sustainability, and recommendations for follow-up. The scores and discussion outcomes are captured in a matrix.*
Most Significant Change (MSC)	*The Most Significant Change process involves generating and analyzing personal accounts of change related to the evaluated programme or policy and deciding which is the most significant. It provides information about impact and unintended impact and an insight into what different groups and individuals value.*
Pilot study	*A small scale study conducted to test the plan and method of a research study.*
Qualitative data	*Descriptive data which can be observed, but not measured. It can include text, images, sound, etc. but not numerical/quantitative values. It is typically gathered via research methods like case study, observation, and ethnography. Results are not usually considered generalizable, but are often transferable. See: quantitative data.*

Quantitative data	*Measures of values or counts expressed as numbers. Quantitative data can be quantified and verified and used for statistical analysis. Results can often be generalized, though this is not always the case. See: quantitative data.*
Regression analysis	*A statistical procedure for predicting values of a dependent variable based on the values of one or more independent variables.*
Spider diagram	*A participatory evaluation method to illuminate different views and evaluate progress towards different objectives. The completed diagram looks like a spider web.*
Theory of Change	*Explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. It can be developed for any level of intervention – an event, a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy or an organization.*
Validity	*The degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. A method can be reliable, consistently measuring the same thing, but not valid. See: reliability.*