



Impact Evaluation Primer



After having reviewed the “Participatory Evaluation Primer”, you now have a better understanding of what constitutes participatory evaluation, as well as the benefits and challenges of such an approach. To serve as a reminder, “**evaluation**” is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation or results of a program or process for the purposes of learning or decision-making (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2014). Evaluations of any type tend to serve three main purposes:

1. Accountability
2. Program development
3. Generating knowledge (Chelimsky, 1997).

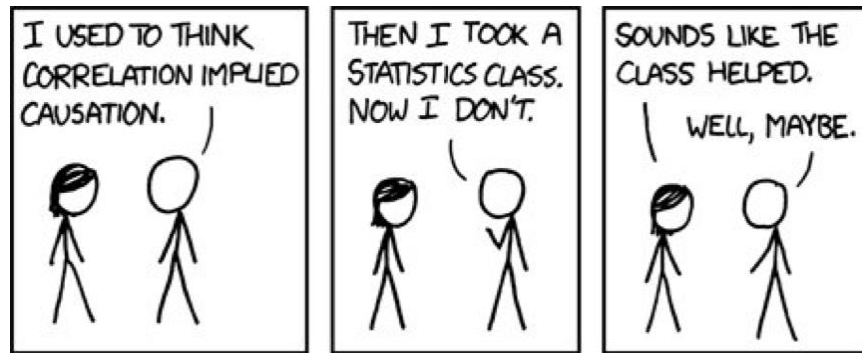
Participatory evaluations are just one of many other types of evaluations. Three alternative types of evaluations that are often used are:

Process evaluations attempt to monitor and assess the various components or processes of a project or intervention. This type of evaluation is not yet concerned with the final outcomes of the project, but determines what approaches were used, whether problems were encountered by program users, and what processes were successful and why (Aubel, 1999).

Outcome evaluations, on the other hand, do look at the outcomes of the evaluation. This type of evaluation determines whether the objectives and goals of the project were accomplished in the ways that were intended (Aubel, 1999). Outcome evaluations tell us what our projects are actually doing and what they are changing.

Impact evaluations are evaluation processes that are concerned with measuring the level of change or **impact** attributed by a program or intervention, and will be the focus of this primer. By definition, **an Impact Evaluation** “*provides information about the impacts produced by an intervention - positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect*” (Peersman, 2015).

*It is important to keep in mind that impact doesn’t imply causation. Even though a factor is found to influence a project or program, we cannot assume that that factor is the cause of the program’s outcomes. We often talk about how a project “contributes” to larger, societal changes rather than trying to think about direct attribution.



Before beginning an impact evaluation, evaluators should ask:

WHY is an impact evaluation being conducted? (i.e. for accountability, program development, or generating knowledge)

WHO will benefit?

WHAT impact will the evaluation have and **HOW**?

The processes of impact evaluations are very similar to other forms of evaluations, but have a greater emphasis on the types of indicators used to measure the impact of a program/project. **Indicators** are the variables or changes that can be measured throughout the evaluation. There are three primary indicators generally used with impact evaluations:

1. **Process indicators** measure the tangible components of a program once it has been implemented, like whether there is an appropriate number of staff employed to carry out the program's activities.



2. **Outcome Indicators** measure the changes that occur as a result of program activities.

3. **Impact indicators** "measure the fundamental assets, resources and feelings of people affected by the project" (Catley, Burns, Abebe & Suji, 2013, p.2). These indicators give evaluation participants a better sense of the impact a program is having on program users and the surrounding community in which the program is situated. We can measure things like household income, health and wellness, security, confidence and hope.



The OECD-DAC also recommends a set of criteria for examining an intervention using the following considerations:

1. Relevancy of the intervention's objectives with the objectives of the intended users and the setting in which the intervention takes place
2. Effectiveness of the intervention in achieving its objectives
3. Efficient use of program resources
4. Overall impact of the intervention
5. Sustainability of the intervention (OECD-DAC, n.d.).

Participatory Impact Assessments

Consistent with Impact Evaluations, **Participatory Impact Evaluations** or **Participatory Impact Assessments (PIAs)** use participatory methods to measure change or impact attributed to a certain program or project. PIAs aim to measure the impact of a program on the lives of the intended users of the program or the individuals that are most impacted by the program. This type of evaluation differs from other forms of evaluation that are mostly concerned with measuring the program's objectives, and whether they were achieved or not.

PIAs are flexible and can be adapted to the local setting in which the program is going to be applied. This type of evaluation also favours input from users of the program since they are most likely experiencing the program's impact directly and these “... *local people are capable of identifying and measuring their own indicators of change*” (Catley, 1999).

To serve as an example, researchers at the Feinstein International Center have been applying participatory approaches to measure the impact of aid projects on people's lives in both development and humanitarian contexts. These researchers have organized their experience of conducting PIAs into an eight-stage framework, which can be adapted to different contexts and project interventions. This framework is outlined in the caption on the left, taken from *Participatory Impact Assessment: A Design Guide* (resource listed below).

Now that the indicators are defined and data is collected... What do we do?

These results can then be translated into any agreed upon form that later goes to inform or improve program processes. For example, measures of project impact can be translated into economic values and used for benefit–cost analysis. The results yielded by impact evaluations are generally most valuable when comparisons are made between changes that happen once an intervention is in place and the changes that would have normally occurred if there was not an intervention.

Benefits of Impact Evaluations:

- They capture and document any unintended or unforeseeable impacts of a project so that a change can be made early on in the implementation stage of a program.
- They provide a systematic approach to impact measurement, allowing evaluators to improve accountability.
- The results from impact assessments can be important and sometimes critical for influencing new policy and good practice guidelines.

Eight stages for designing a Participatory Impact Assessment

Stage 1 Define the questions to be answered

Stage 2 Define the geographical and time limits of the project

Stage 3 Identify and prioritize locally defined impact indicators

Stage 4 Decide which methods to use for measuring change, and test them

Stage 5 Decide which sampling method and sample size to use

Stage 6 Decide how to assess project attribution

Stage 7 Decide how to triangulate results from participatory methods with other information

Stage 8 Plan the feedback and final cross-checking of results with communities

Other Resources:

Peersman's (2015) **Guide to Impact evaluation** is another resourceful tool for evaluation guidelines and can be retrieved from http://www.betterevaluation.org/themes/impact_evaluation

The Feinstein International Center has developed a **Participatory Impact Assessment: A Design Guide**, which can be accessed at: http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/PIA-guide_revised-2014-3.pdf

OECD-DAC's Principles **for Evaluation of Development Assistance**, accessed from <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/50584880.pdf>

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Cartoon: Randall Munroe <http://xkcd.com/552/>